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Editorial

The Simple and the True

SOMEWHERE in the Talmud, I believe, there is a theological dispute over whether or not the world ought to have been created. The conclusion reached was that it would have been better for all concerned had the universe never come into being, but since it does exist, man ought to devote himself to the doing of good deeds.

Though this bit of dialectic has always seemed to me strangely affecting, I cannot honestly say that it is persuasive. In a way, one is moved to accept it for fear of the roaring chaos that further enquiry might provoke. Something of this same awful fear is probably at the bottom of Miss C. V. Wedgwood's attitude, expressed elsewhere in this issue of ENCOUNTER, towards the teaching of history. After many distinguished years in the service of Clio, she has come to think that this muse—like many another nubile female—is out of place in the classroom, for history "deals with the behaviour of adult human beings in a highly complex world, and can only be brought within the understanding of immature human beings with little experience of the world by a process of compression and simplification which is necessarily misleading."

And here, like the Talmudist, she balks. Since history does exist in the schools, we should concern ourselves with the good teaching of it. Doubtless she is right. Even though history, less than a century ago, had no place in the ordinary curriculum, it is now so entrenched, so jealously guarded by vested interests, that any gestures towards its elimination would incite to turmoil and tumult. This being so, we may as well contemplate its improvement rather than its abolition. But how? Here the Talmudist had an advantage on us, for he at least knew very definitely what a good deed was.

SCHOPENHAUER found history "as thoroughly infected with lies as is a streetwalker with syphilis." This was one of his typical exaggerations, and takes no account of the scientific achievements in both fields—though one is a bit taken aback to learn from no less an authority than Professor Herbert Butterfield that "a hundred years of historical enquiry may carry students further from the truth than they were at the beginning." However, it is nevertheless true that, infected or disinfected, history in the classroom is dressed in deceptively sheer silks which, variously moulded by the breezes of intellectual fashion, inflame the senses and corrupt the imagination of youth.

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They believe they have seen what they have merely fancied, and that they know what they have yet to learn: they leave school totally unprepared for a marriage with reality, which, when it is pressed upon them, produces resentment, shame, and vulgar insolence.

The study of history in the schools is populating the world with Men Who Know—people incapable of understanding the least bit about themselves, their wives, their friends, but who know all about Capitalism, Communism, Imperialism, Colonialism, Progress and Reaction, The Origins of War, and The Economic System.

So it is that the Germans knew that the Elders of Zion ruled the world and went to war in order to end this supremacy; having lost, they now know that it is an error to try and fight the Jews, who are omnipotent. The faithful readers of the *New Statesman and Nation* knew that there was no genuine enmity between Hindu and Moslem in India, except in so far as it was stimulated by the Foreign Office, just as they now know that it is only colonialism which, in Malaya, stands between the happy reconciliation of the Chinese and Malay communities. Most Britons know that American policy towards China is dictated by the China Lobby, just as most Americans know that British policy emanates from the Hong Kong Lobby. All of France knows that the reason the Krupp works were so little damaged during the war was because the Anglo-American monopolists helped select the bombing targets, just as all Italy knows that the reason behind the Marshall Plan was that the Americans had so much money that they had to give some away lest they become poor through being excessively rich.

THERE are some fields of study where there seems to be a positive relation between the simple and the true. Geometry is one of them. Moral philosophy, I would claim, is another—though, such is our present distress, there is actually a class of people who assert that moral philosophy is an exercise in demonstrating the meaninglessness of virtue rather than a loyal effort in its defence. In the study of history, however, one can almost say that between the simple and the true there is a flat contradiction.

This being so, it would seem to be incumbent upon teachers of history to make the study of their subject infinitely more difficult than it is, instead of—as is the current tendency—always straining to make it easier. The habits of simplicity are deeply ingrained; at the London School of Economics, I am informed, the undergraduates study the Industrial Revolution, the graduate students learn there was no such thing, and then go on to teach *their* students that there was. This is a relatively trivial matter, of course, but it is a sign of more portentous things: and perhaps it is not so trivial after all, when one realises how many Asian statesmen, educated in English or American universities, feel that the Industrial Revolution is a revolution that any self-respecting and up-to-date statesman must "make."

Might it not be a good idea to convene an academic Sanhedrin and, like the rabbis of old, put a fence round esoteric wisdom? Cannot the study of history—whether "elementary" or "advanced"—be completely reserved, like the Cabala, for the happy few? To be sure, that would mean fewer teachers of history, and we should miss them—but, oh, how fewer opportunities for *les terribles simplificateurs!* And if it is objected that, under such a system, someone like Winston Churchill might never get a chance to study history in school, it could be pointed out that, as a matter of fact, he didn't.

Irving Kristol

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Two Themes in Indian Poetry

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Aldous Huxley

Faith, Taste, and History

AMONG tall stories, surely one of the tallest is the history of Mormonism. A founder whose obviously home-made revelations were accepted as more than gospel truth by thousands of followers; a lieutenant and successor who was "for daring a Cromwell, for intrigue a Machiavelli, for executive force a Moses, and for utter lack of conscience a Bonaparte"; a body of doctrine combining the most penetrating psychological insights with preposterous history and absurd metaphysics; a society of puritanical but theatre-going and music-loving polygamists; a church once condemned by the Supreme Court as an organised rebellion, but now a monolith of respectability; a passionately loyal membership distinguished, even in these middle years of the 20th century, by the old-fashioned Protestant and pioneering virtues of self-reliance and mutual aid—together, these make up a tale which no self-respecting reader, even of Science Fiction, should be asked to swallow. And yet, in spite of its total lack of plausibility, the tale happens to be true.

My book-knowledge of its truth had been acquired long ago and intermittently kept up to date. It was not, however, until the spring of 1953 that I had occasion actually to see and touch the concrete evidences of that strange history.

We had driven all day in torrential rain, sometimes even in untimely snow, across Nevada. Hour after hour in the vast blankness of desert plains, past black, bald mountains that suddenly closed in through the driving rain, to recede again, after a score of wintry miles, into the grey distance. At the State line the weather had cleared for a little, and there below us, unearthly in a momentary gleam of sunshine, lay the Great Salt Desert of Utah, snow-white between the nearer crags, with the line of blue or inky peaks rising, far off, from the opposite shore of that dry ghost of an inland sea.

There was another storm as we entered Salt Lake City, and it was through sheets of falling water that we caught our first glimpse, above the chestnut trees, of a flood-lit object quite as difficult to believe in, despite the evidence of our senses, as the strange history it commemorates. The improbability of this greatest of the Mormon Temples does not consist in its astounding ugliness. Most Victorian churches are astoundingly ugly. It consists in a certain combination of oddity, dullness, and monumentality unique, so far as I know, in the annals of architecture.

For the most part, Victorian buildings are more or less learned pastiches of something else—something Gothic, something Greek or nobly Roman, something Elizabethan or Flamboyant Flemish, or even vaguely Oriental. But this Temple looks like nothing on earth—and yet contrives to be completely unoriginal, utterly and uniformly prosaic. Moreover, whereas most of the churches built during the past century are gimcrack affairs of brick veneered with imitation stone, of lattice work plastered to look like masonry, this vast essay in eccentric dreariness was realised, from crypt to capstone, in the solidest of granite. Its foundations are cyclopean, its walls are three yards thick. Like the Escorial, like the Great Pyramid, it was built to last indefinitely. Long after the rest of Victorian and 20th century architecture shall have crumbled back to dust, this thing will be standing in the Western desert, an object, to the neo-Neolithic savages, of post-atomic times, of uncomprehending reverence and superstitious alarm.

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TO WHAT extent are the arts conditioned by, or indebted to, religion? And is there, at any given moment of history, a common socio-psychological source that gives to the various arts—music and painting, architecture and sculpture—some kind of common tendency? What I saw that night in Temple Square, and what I heard next day during an organ recital in the Tabernacle, brought up the old problem in a new and, in many ways, enlightening context.

Here, in the floodlights, was the most grandiose by far of all Western Cathedrals. This Chartres of the desert was begun and largely built under economic and social conditions hardly distinguishable from those prevailing in France or England in the 10th century. In 1853, when the Temple's foundation-stone was laid, London could boast its Crystal Palace, could look back complacently on its Great Exhibition of the marvels of early Victorian technology. But here in Utah men were still living in the Dark Ages—without roads, without towns, with no means of communication faster than the ox-wagon or mule-train, without industry, without machines, without tools more elaborate than saws and scythes and hammers—and with precious few even of those. The granite blocks of which the temple is built were quarried by man-power, dressed by man-power, hauled over twenty miles of trackless desert by man-power and ox-power, hoisted into position by man-power. Like the cathedrals of medieval Europe the Temple is a monument, among other things, to the strength and heroic endurance of stripped muscle.

In the Spanish colonies, as in the American South, stripped muscle was activated by the whip. But here in the West there were no African slaves and no local supply of domesticable aborigines. Whatever the settlers wanted to do had to be done by their own hands. The ordinary run of settlers wanted only houses and mills and mines and (if the nuggets were large enough) Paris fashions imported at immense expense around the Horn. But these Mormons wanted something more—a granite Temple of indestructible solidity. Within a few years of their arrival in Utah they set to work. There were no whips to stimulate their muscles, only faith—but in what abundance! It was the kind of mountain-moving faith that gives men power to achieve the impossible and bear the intolerable, the kind of faith for which men die and kill and work themselves beyond the limits of human capacity, the kind of faith that had launched the Crusades and raised the towers of Angkor-Vat. Once again it performed its historic miracle. Against enormous odds, a great cathedral was built in the wilderness. Alas, instead of Bourges or Canterbury, it was This.

FAITH, it is evident, may be relied on to produce sustained action and, more rarely, sustained contemplation. There is, however, no guarantee that it will produce good art. Religion is always a patron of the arts, but its taste is by no means impeccable. Religious art is sometimes excellent, sometimes atrocious; and the excellence is not necessarily associated with fervour nor the atrocity with lukewarmness. Thus, at the turn of our era, Buddhism flourished in North-western India. Piety, to judge by the large number of surviving monuments, ran high; but artistic merit ran pretty low. Or consider Hindu art. For the last three centuries it has been astonishingly feeble. Have the many varieties of Hinduism been taken less seriously than in the times when Indian art was in its glory? There is not the slightest reason to believe it. Similarly there is not the slightest reason to believe that Catholic fervour was less intense in the age of the Mannerists than it had been three generations earlier. On the contrary, there is good reason to believe that, during the Counter-Reformation, Catholicism was taken more seriously by more people than at any time since the 14th century. But the bad Catholicism of the High Renaissance produced superb religious art; the good Catholicism of the later 16th and 17th centuries produced a great deal of rather bad religious art. Turning now to the individual artist—and after all, there is no such thing as "Art," there are only men at work—we find that the creators of religious masterpieces are sometimes, like Fra Angelico, extremely devout, sometimes no more than conventionally

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orthodox, sometimes (like Perugino, the supreme exponent of pietism in art) active and open disbelievers.

For the artist in his professional capacity, religion is important because it offers him a wealth of interesting subject-matter and many opportunities to exercise his skill. Upon the quality of his production it has little or no influence. The excellence of a work of religious art depends on two factors, neither of which has anything to do with religion. It depends primarily on the presence in the artist of certain tendencies, sensibilities, and talents; and, secondarily, it depends on the earlier history of his chosen art, and on what may be called the logic of its formal relations. At any given moment that internal logic points towards conclusions beyond those which, as a matter of historical fact, have been reached by the majority of contemporary artists. A recognition of this fact may impel certain artists—especially young artists—to try to realise those possible conclusions in concrete actuality. Sometimes these attempts are fully successful; sometimes, in spite of their author's talents, they fail. In either case, the outcome does not depend on the nature of the artist's metaphysical beliefs, nor on the warmth with which he entertains them.

The Mormons had faith and their faith enabled them to realise a prodigious ideal—the building of a Temple in the wilderness. But though faith can move mountains, it cannot of itself shape those mountains into cathedrals. It will activate muscle, but has no power to create architectural talent where none exists. Still less can it alter the facts of artistic history and the internal logic of forms.

For a great variety of reasons, some sociological and some intrinsically æsthetic, some easily discernible and others obscure, the traditions of the European arts and crafts had been disintegrated, by the middle years of the 19th century, into a chaos of fertile bad taste and ubiquitous vulgarity. In their favour, in the intensity of their concern with metaphysical problems, in their readiness to embrace the most eccentric beliefs and practices, the Mormons, like their contemporaries in a hundred Christian, Socialist, or Spiritualist communities, belonged to the Age of the Gnostics. In everything else they were typical products of rustic 19th century America. And in the field of the plastic arts 19th century America, especially rustic America, was worse off even than 19th century Europe. Barry's Houses of Parliament were as much beyond these temple-builders as Bourges or Canterbury.

NEXT morning, in the enormous wooden Tabernacle, we listened to the daily organ recital. There was some Bach and a piece by César Franck and finally some improvised variations on a hymn tune. These last reminded one irresistibly of the good old days of the Silent Screen—the days when, in a solemn hush and under spotlights, the tail-coated organist at the console of his Wurlitzer would rise majestically from the cellarage, would turn and bend his swan-like loins in acknowledgment of the applause, would resume his seat and slowly extend his white hands. Silence, and then boom! the Picture Palace was filled with the enormous snoring of thirty-two-foot contra-trombones and bombardes. And after the snoring would come the Londonderry Air on the *vox humana*, "A Little Grey Home in the West" on the *vox angelica*, and perhaps (what bliss!) "The End of a Perfect Day" on the *vox treacliana*, the *vox bedroomica*, the *vox unmentionabilis*.

How strange, I found myself reflecting, as the glutinous tide washed over me, how strange that people should listen with apparently equal enjoyment to this kind of thing and the Prelude and Fugue in E flat major. Or had I got hold of the wrong end of the stick? Perhaps mine was the strange, the essentially abnormal attitude. Perhaps there was something wrong with a listener who found it difficult to adore both these warblings around a hymn tune *and* the Prelude and Fugue.

From these unanswerable questions my mind wandered to others, hardly less puzzling, in the domain of history. Here was this huge instrument. In its original and already monumental state, it was a project of pioneering faith. An Australian musician and early Mormon convert, Joseph Ridges, had furnished the design and supervised the work. The

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timber used for making the pipes was hauled by oxen from forests three hundred miles to the south. The intricate machinery of a great organ was home-made by local craftsmen. When the work was finished, what kind of music, one wonders, was played to the Latter Day Saints assembled in the Tabernacle? Hymns, of course, in profusion. But also Handel, also Haydn and Mozart, also Mendelssohn and perhaps even a few pieces by that queer old fellow whom Mendelssohn had resurrected, John Sebastian Bach.

It is one of the paradoxes of history that the people who built the monstrosities of the Victorian epoch should have been the same as the people who applauded, in their hideous halls and churches, such masterpieces of orderliness and unaffected grandeur as The Messiah, and who preferred to all his contemporaries that most elegantly classical of the moderns, Felix Mendelssohn. Popular taste in one field may be more or less completely at variance with popular taste outside that field. Still more surprisingly, the fundamental tendencies of professionals in one of the arts may be at variance with the fundamental tendencies of professionals in other arts.

UNTIL very recently the music of the 15th, 16th, and early 17th centuries was, to all but learned specialists, almost completely unknown. Now, thanks to long-playing phonograph records, more and more of this buried treasure is coming to the surface. The interested amateur is at last in a position to hear for himself what, before, he could only read about. Now, for the first time, he can actually hear what people were singing when Botticelli was painting *Venus and Mars*; what Van Eyck might have heard in the way of love songs and polyphonic masses; what kind of music was being sung or played in St. Mark's while Tintoretto and Veronese were at work, next door, in the Doge's Palace; what developments were taking place in the sister-art during the more than sixty years of Bernini's career as sculptor and architect.

Dunstable and Dufay, Ockeghem and Josquin, Lassus, Palestrina, Victoria—their overlapping lives cover the whole of the 15th and 16th centuries. Music, in those two centuries, underwent momentous changes. The dissonances of the earlier, Gothic polyphony were reduced to universal consonance; the various artifices—imitation, diminution, augmentation, and the rest—were perfected and, by the greater masters, used to create rhythmical patterns of incredible subtlety and richness. But through the whole period virtually all serious music retained those open-ended, free-floating forms which it had inherited from the Gregorian Chant and, more remotely, from some Oriental ancestor. In contrast, European folk music was symmetrical, four-square, with regular returns to the same starting point and balanced phrases, as in metrical poetry, of pre-established and foreseeable length. Based upon plain-chant and written, for the most part, as a setting to the liturgical texts, learned music was analogous not to scanned verse but to prose. It was a music without bars—that is to say, with no regularity of emphasis. Its component elements were of different lengths, there were no returns to recognisable starting-points, and its geometrical analogue was not some closed figure, like the square or circle, but an open curve undulating away to infinity. That such a music ever reached a close was due not to the internal logic of its forms but solely to the fact that even the longest liturgical texts come at last to their Amen. Some attempt to supply a purely musical reason for not going on for ever was made by those composers who wrote their masses around a *cantus firmus*—a melody borrowed, almost invariably, from the closed, symmetrical music of popular songs. Sung or played in very slow time, and hidden in the tenor, sometimes even in the bass, the *cantus firmus* was, for all practical purposes, inaudible. It existed for the benefit not of listeners but of the composer; not to remind bored churchgoers of what they had heard last night in the tavern, but to serve a strictly artistic purpose. Even when the *cantus firmus* was present, the general effect of unconditioned, free-floating continuousness persisted. But, for the composer, the task of organisation had been made easier; for buried within the fluid

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heart of the music was the unbending armature of a fully metrical song.

WHILE Dufay was still a choir boy at Cambrai, Ghiberti was at work on the bronze doors of Santa Maria del Fiore, the young Donatello had been given his first commissions. And when Victoria, the last and greatest of the Roman masters, died in 1613, Lorenzo Bernini was already a full-blown infant prodigy. From Early Renaissance to Baroque, the fundamental tendency of the plastic arts was through symmetry and beyond it, away from closed forms towards unbalanced openness and the implication of infinity. In music, during this same period, the fundamental tendency was through openness and beyond it, away from floating continuousness towards metre, towards four-square symmetry, towards regular and foreseeable recurrence. It was in Venice that the two opposite tendencies, of painting and of music, first became conspicuous. While Tintoretto and Veronese moved towards openness and the asymmetrical, the two Gabrielis moved, in their motets and their instrumental music, towards harmony, towards regular scansion and the closed form. In Rome, Palestrina and Victoria continued to work in the old free-floating style. At St. Mark's, the music of the future—the music which in due course was to develop into the music of Purcell and Couperin, of Bach and Handel—was in process of being born. By the 1630's, when even sculpture had taken wing for the infinite, Bernini's older contemporary, Heinrich Schuetz, the pupil of Giovanni Gabrieli, was writing (not always, but every now and then) symmetrical music that sounds almost like Bach.

For some odd reason, this kind of music has recently been labelled "baroque." The choice of this nickname is surely unfortunate. If Bernini and his Italian, German, and Austrian followers are baroque artists (and they have been so designated for many years), then there is no justification, except in the fact that they happened to be living at the same time, for applying the same epithet to composers, whose fundamental tendencies in regard to form were radically different from theirs.

About the only 17th century composer to whom the term "baroque" can be applied, in the same sense as we apply it to Bernini, is Claudio Monteverdi. In his operas and his religious music there are passages in which Monteverdi combines the openness and boundlessness of the older polyphony with a new expressiveness. The feat is achieved by setting an unconditionally soaring melody to an accompaniment not of other voices but of variously coloured chords. The so-called baroque composers are baroque (in the established sense of the word) only in their desire for a more direct and dramatic expression of feeling. To realise this desire, they developed modulation within a fully tonal system, they exchanged polyphony for harmony, they varied the tempo of their music and the volume of its sound, and they invented modern orchestration. In this concern with expressiveness they were akin to their contemporaries in the fields of painting and sculpture. But in their desire for squareness, closedness, and symmetry they were poles apart from men whose first wish was to overthrow the tyranny of centrality, to break out of the cramping frame or niche, to transcend the merely finite and the all too human.

Between 1598 and 1680—the years of Bernini's birth and death—baroque painting and sculpture moved in one direction, baroque music, as it is miscalled, moved in another, almost opposite direction. The only conclusion we can draw is that the internal logic and the recent history of the art, in which a man is working, exercise a more powerful influence upon him than do the social, religious, and political events of the time in which he lives. Fifteenth-century sculptors and painters inherited a tradition of symmetry and closedness. Fifteenth-century composers inherited a tradition of openness and asymmetry. On either side the intrinsic logic of the forms was worked out to its ultimate conclusion. By the end of the 16th century neither the musical nor the plastic artists could go any further along the roads they had been following. Going beyond themselves, the painters and sculptors pursued the path of open-ended asymmetry, the free-floating musicians turned to the exploration of

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regular recurrence and the closed form. Meanwhile, the usual wars and persecutions and sectarian throat-cuttings were in full swing; there were economic revolutions, political and social revolutions, revolutions in science and technology. But these merely historical events seem to have affected artists only materially—by ruining them or making their fortunes, by giving or withholding the opportunity to display their skill, by changing the social or religious status of potential patrons. Their thought and feeling, their fundamental artistic tendencies were reactions to events of a totally different order—events not in the social world but in the special universe of each man's chosen art.

TAKE Schuetz, for example. Most of his adult life was spent in running away from the recurrent horrors of the Thirty Years War. But the changes and chances of a discontinuous existence left no corresponding traces upon his work. Whether at Dresden or in Italy, in Denmark or at Dresden again, he went on drawing the artistically logical conclusions from the premises formulated under Gabrieli at Venice and gradually modified, through the years, by his own successive achievements, and the achievements of his contemporaries and juniors.

Man is a whole, but a whole with an astounding capacity for living, simultaneously or successively, in watertight compartments. What happens here has little or no effect on what happens there. The 17th century taste for closed forms in music was inconsistent with the 17th century taste for asymmetry and openness in the plastic arts. The Victorian taste for Mendelssohn and Handel was inconsistent with the Victorian taste for Mormon Temples, Albert Halls, and St. Pancras Railway Stations. But in fact these mutually exclusive tastes co-existed and had no perceptible effects on one another. Consistency is a verbal criterion, which cannot be applied to the phenomena of life. Taken together, the various activities of a single individual may "make no sense," and yet be perfectly compatible with biological survival, social success, and personal happiness.

Objective time is the same for every member of a human group and, within each individual, for each inhabitant of a watertight compartment. But the self in one compartment does not necessarily have the same *Zeitgeist* as the selves in other compartments or as the selves in whom other individuals do their equally inconsistent living. When the stresses of history are at a maximum, men and women tend to react to them in the same way. For example, if their country is involved in war, most individuals become heroic and self-sacrificing. And if the war produces famine and pestilence, most of them die. But where the historical pressures are more moderate, individuals are at liberty, within rather wide limits, to react to them in different ways. We are always synchronous with ourselves and others; but it often happens that we are not contemporary with either.

AT Logan, for example, in the shadow of another Temple, whose battlemented turrets gave it the air of an Early Victorian "folly," of a backdrop to Edmund Kean in *Richard III*, we got into conversation with a charming contemporary, not of Harry Emerson Frosdick or the late Bishop Barnes, but of Brother Juniper —a Mormon whose faith had all the fervour, all the unqualified literalness, of peasant faith in the 13th century. He talked to us at length about the weekly baptisms of the dead. Fifteen hundred of them baptised by proxy every Saturday evening and thus, at long last, admitted to that heaven where all the family ties persist throughout the æons. To a member of a generation brought up on Freud, these posthumous prospects seemed a bit forbidding. Not so to Brother Juniper. He spoke of them with a kind of quiet rapture. And how celestially beautiful, in his eyes, was this cyclopean gazebo! How inestimable the privilege, which he had earned, of being allowed to pass through its doors! Doors forever closed to all Gentiles and even to a moiety of the Latter Day Saints. Around that heavenly Temple the lilac trees in full scent and the mountains that ringed the fertile valley were white with the snowy symbol of divine purity. But time pressed. We left Brother Juniper to his paradise and drove on.

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That evening, in the tiny Natural History Museum at Idaho Falls, we found ourselves talking to two people from a far remoter past —a fascinating couple straight out of a cave. Not one of your fancy Magdalenian caves with all that modernistic art-work on the walls. No, no—a good old-fashioned, down-to-earth cave belonging to nice ordinary people three thousand generations before the invention of painting. These were Piltdowners whose reaction to the stuffed grizzly was a remark about sizzling steaks of bear-meat; these were early Neanderthalers who could not see a fish or bird or four-footed creature without immediately dreaming of slaughter and a feast.

"Boy!" said the cave lady, as we stood with them before the solemn, clergyman-like head of an enormous moose. "Would *he* be good with onions!"

It was fortunate, I reflected, that we were so very thin, they so well-fed and amiable.

THE TARANTULA OF LUVE

Luve, it is deeper nor us, this bane
Our problem, ecstacie, this passion
Semple and eyetooth pain
In its ain labyrinth—the classic situation.

Here the tarantula is king
Mated wi despair and fed on hopes—
And spins their fell conjunction in
Our ravelled horoscopes.

What use the talk, the torment
The minotaur's rank braith upon us—?
And Goddess, God and our bairns' bairns
E'en nou greitan for us. . . .

Sydney Goodsir Smith

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Silvio D'Arzo

Exile (a long story)

So you can't reach that place up there by train? . . .
—No. Nor by bus. . . . By mule-back it takes three hours. And, of course, that's not in winter. Nor when the snow melts. You wouldn't make it in five hours then.
I see. But it must have a name.
—Yes, I think it has. That must be the only thing it has got.

UNEXPECTEDLY, from the path leading to the pastures, yet still from afar, came the barking of a dog.

We all looked up.

And then two or three dogs. And then the sound of bronze cattle-bells.

Gathered in the candlelight round the leaf-stuffed mattress, besides myself, were two or three women of the household and one or two old crones from the village. Have you ever attended an anatomy lecture? Then you'll see what I mean. We all looked rather like that. All that could be seen within the ruddy circle of candlelight was our six faces assembled as though round a crib, the mattress in our midst, a shard of wall blackened by smoke, and a wooden beam even blacker.

The rest was darkness.

"Did you women hear anything?" said I, jumping to my feet.

The oldest of them took the candle and went slowly to open the window. For a minute we were plunged into darkness.

The air around us was violet and so were the paths and the grass of the pastures, the ravines and the mountain-tops; and among the shadows, far away, we could just see four or five lanterns descending towards the village.

"It's the men coming down from the pastures," the old crone muttered as she rejoined us, "and they'll be here in ten minutes."

This was a fact and I had time to take breath. I am ashamed to say it, but there you are; last goodbyes have never been my line. Especially this kind. Without a word I moved over to the doorway.

"So it's all settled, your Reverence," said one of the women following me: "We'll wash and shave him; and you'll see to laying him out tonight."

"I'll send Melide to sew the shroud tomorrow," I said: "What about the women for the wake?"

"They wanted three hundred and fifty with food and accommodation for the night. So let's manage without them. Especially as our relatives happen to be coming from Braino."

"Yes, it probably isn't worth it," said I. "There'll be no shortage of people tomorrow. Am I wrong or didn't he have parts in our miracle plays?"

"Yes, as Jacob. And once as King Charlemagne of France. In fifty years of sheep-rearing near Bobbio everyone gets to know everyone else."

The widow was seated near the mattress. People don't weep easily up here; so she remained stiff and motionless like the old woman at the Duomo in town waiting for her pennies. The grandchildren had been taken off to bed.

"Good night," I said in a low voice, "I'll be back at seven tomorrow morning."

She nodded. Two or three of the women accompanied me down.

The sound of the dogs and the bronze cattle-bells became clearer and clearer, now and again mingled with the noise of stamping. Behind a window a child was coughing and you could hear the mules kicking in the stalls and champing their iron bits. It was beginning

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to get cold. I crossed the cobbled piazza and made my way through the two streets only an arm's width wide; so narrow, I am telling you, that an old Falstaff such as myself had to crawl through with elbows held in tight.

At the pond I turned and looked down behind me. Seven houses. Seven houses backing on to the cliffs and nothing else: add two rocky streets, a courtyard they call a piazza, a pond, a rivulet, and all the mountains you could possibly want.

The three old crones were still standing there motionless by the stone steps outside the house under the lighted open window.

"And so that's Montelice," I said, "that's all there is; and no-one knows it."

And I began climbing the hill-track.

I SHRUGGED my shoulders ever so slightly. I won't say it was a silly question though it seemed to me so at the time; what would have been silly was any kind of answer.

The young man stared at me and waited. Yes, he must have been about twenty. Perhaps even less, eighteen say. Anyway, eighteen was the age he deserved: and his black cassock apart, in the whole world you couldn't have run into anything *greener* than him.

"You ask what they do at Montelice?" I said: "Well. They live . . . that's it; they live and that's about all I think."

The fellow can't have felt very much the wiser. He had caught me there in my armchair without even my shoes on, looking like Falstaff and, what's more, dozing; and now all he got was that answer.

Luckily he still retained a little breeding, and in his own way had even quite good manners; something as *new* as could be, I tell you, only just minted.

"Yes, I understand," he had the presence of mind to say, as if I had given him a piece of exact and confidential information. "I see perfectly. They live."

He was the new parish priest of Braino. No sooner had he arrived there than he took it into his head to come up and see me to ask for advice. And, of course, to make my acquaintance. He had immediately begun asking me a whole heap of questions about dancing, communists, morality and all that. And, to put it in a nutshell, he didn't show the slightest inclination to hurry off. But all with the nicest manners, and with deference, so that you didn't even notice it. I found listening to him rather amusing. But also sad. Rather sad. When you look at the clothes of that little employee of the commune, down below there, who is a widower too, the first thing that comes to your mind is that once upon a time he himself was fresh and new.

"And then they die," I added.

As I was over sixty and had my shoes lying undone there on the floor, there was no danger of passing as a cynic.

"You see nothing ever happens to anything up here. And it doesn't at Braino either, as you'll soon find out. Nor in the whole area almost as far as the valley. The men are out on the pastures now and won't be back until nightfall; one or two are up by the marshes and the women are scattered collecting wood. If you take a glance down the street the most you'll ever see will be an old crone blowing her charcoal. If you're lucky, that is. . . . Or a nanny-goat. Perhaps only the goat. (In a way they're the real mistresses of the place; they stand looking out of the doorways for the pleasure of watching anyone who comes, if anyone does.) And in two weeks' time you won't find even them. Winter reaches us early and lasts nearly half the year."

He looked as though he didn't quite believe me, as though he felt a slight contempt for me, though in a kindly way.

"I was referring to the people. . . . I mean the men and women," he said civilly.

"Oh, the people. The same thing applies to them. It's the old story of the village doctor. He comes up as a boy and as fresh as can be with his thermometer and his diploma expecting to do heaven knows what; and he is quite prepared for a bit to play the martyr. For there are people who don't at all dislike martyrdom —for a short time of course. No sooner has he arrived than he makes a tour of the whole mountainside on his mule and looks into all the huts and so on and so on. And so as not to lose touch he subscribes to three or four reviews."

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I emptied my little glass of *grappa*. In his turn he put his lips to his but only just as a young squirrel would.

"Then he realises there's nothing but cases of arthritis: sciatica and arthritis, arthritis and sciatica, and nothing else. So all he's got to do is to prescribe iodine and grow fat."

His only answer was a look.

"Yes, like me. Just that."

"Please," he smiled at me, "I didn't mean that."

"All right, but I can see what you're thinking," said I in rather too fatherly a way I'm afraid. But this stripling wasn't the one to be satisfied by this.

He rose with a smile.

"To be sure, one has to have a look around," he concluded urbanely, ignoring me. "New methods are needed. Every epoch needs its own treatment, don't you think?"

Of course, he was right, and I could easily have said Yes to him. The trouble was that he was only too right and this in my eyes is as bad as being wrong, if not worse. And then there were so many other questions. So my answer was quite different.

"Here's a point," said I; "have you ever been in a mountain village, roughly like this one, let's say, for a month of continuous rain?"

He stared at me in some amazement, anyway with some feelings of that kind, and with a look that seemed to me a little amused.

"And add in two months of snow, real deep snow, you get me, not remotely like the snow in towns or in the valley."

He waited to see what I was leading up to.

"You see, I have. And for more than thirty years. More than thirty Christmases."

The fellow was up to every trick. He now managed to give me a look of the utmost deference. By this time he must have thought of me as a queer example of typical local fauna and quite likeable, taking all in all; the last of Garibaldi's thousand or the deaf old woman in town who has been a servant in the same family for a hundred years.

"But what does happen here?" he asked me, for information only.

"Nothing, as I've already said. Nothing at all happens," I tried to make my point clearer. "It merely rains and snows. It rains and snows and that's all."

At long last I plucked up courage to slip on my shoes again. The fellow had the delicacy to avert his glance and look at his hat.

"And the people," I finished, "stay down in the stables and watch the rain and the snow. Like the mules and the goats. That's how it is."

We stayed a moment by the door. He still had something he wanted to say. A nanny-goat poked in her nose; she looked at us rather disappointed and went away, like a member of the household. She would be back later.

"Do you see?" I repeated, my eyes following the nanny-goat. "Nothing whatever. There you are."

"Oh, well. But there are sometimes meetings of this kind, like the one with you today." He slipped away, smiling. "That's something, up here. Thank you so much."

He went down in the direction of Braino. He bore to the left. He was nimble and lithe and dressed like a new penny. An eighteen-year-old, plainly. The youngest thing in the world. Or maybe the oldest.

IT WAS evening, towards the end of October. I was coming down from the mountain bogs. Neither happy nor sad; just as usual; without even a thought. It was late and cold and I still had some way to go: I could hear scattered cattle- and goat-bells a little ahead on the pastures. It was the hour when the sadness of living seems to mount up with the darkness, and you don't know who to blame: a discomforting time. A squirrel scurried across the path, slipping past by my feet.

Just then, down by the torrent rushing along the ravine sixty feet below me, I caught sight of a woman bending over, washing her linen, or rather her rags—a crone a little older than me, round about sixty I should say.

She was the only living thing in all the rather tragic silence, the cold and the pale light. She was bending down wearily, I thought, first soaking her rags in the water and then wringing them out and beating them on a stone; soaking, wringing and beating, over and over again. Neither slowly nor hurriedly, and with down-bent head.

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On the brow of the ravine I stopped to watch her. A large stone slid down into the water, but the old crone took not the slightest notice. Only once did she break off for a moment, to put her hand on her thigh and glance at her push-cart on the edge of the ravine and at her goat grazing in the grass: then she resumed her work.

"Well," said I to myself, "when we get down to it the world can be a sad place. She has all the necessary intelligence for that; and not even a man could reach that point. But the important thing is not to notice her. After all, eyes are made to be shut at times."

A twopenny-halfpenny excuse, I know. But it was getting late; really late; and you could see odd stars in the sky. I went on my way.

But the next evening it was the same. And the next and the one after that. At the same evening hour there she'd be at the bottom of the ravine.

No sun, no moon, not a living soul around: the self-same cattle-bells tinkling ahead on the pastures and the same stillness.

It's all very well to laugh at me; at that hour even the rocks were sad and the grass, now tinged with violet, sadder still. And there she was down there, always bending over her stone slab, dipping her rags, wringing them, and beating them, over and over again. Neither slowly nor fast, and her head always bent.

It's an easy thing to talk about: you should have seen her.

"No," I said, taking a good look at her, "No, I don't think I know her—not that one: the old girl can't belong hereabouts; she must be a bird of passage, a stray. But anyway, she had better come and see me. They all come and see me sooner or later. But what could I say to her, apart from the usual?"

Because I was a routine priest; a routine priest, neither more nor less; on this point no further doubt was possible. When it came to marrying people properly and running the Sunday school for boys, or arbitrating between seven goatherds about pastureland the size of a pocket handkerchief, I was as good as anyone else; and the same went for when a husband started using the belt too often. Those were the things I could deal with; the rest wasn't my business.

All right. Well, I saw her on five consecutive days. Did you ever put a toad in a hole when you were a boy? That's what the boys do here. Every evening they go and look at it and when they find it's still there, evening after evening, always stuck in the same place, they're glad and sorry and they haven't the faintest idea why. It was like that with me, in a way. At a stone's throw from the edge of the ravine I would hope I wouldn't see her again; but when one evening she changed her place and for a moment I couldn't see a sign of her, I could have cursed her.

Besides by this time I would have liked to be able to hurt her a bit. Only slightly, it goes without saying. I hadn't the faintest idea why; indeed, as I knew perfectly well, there wasn't an atom of sense in the thought and if I went on I would only hurt myself as well. But we've all got a mad side to us; our teeth ache, we've got a splitting head, yet we go on wagging our tongues and making sure our pains don't get better.

"There are times," said I to myself, "when it's better to shut our eyes. Why not shut them and turn your back? That's often a safe rule."

The fact was it was already too late; and anyway a rule's only a rule.

I DON'T mind admitting there's something in all this to make one blush, especially since I'm a priest. But a burning village is only a burning village, a war is only a war, and it's the same with earthquakes and floods. What I mean is that real disasters never bothered me over-much. They're no longer our business—that's the way I see it. They're impersonal; no one knows them and they know nobody and first and foremost they don't even know themselves. They come and go; so be it.

And as for complicated feelings and things of that kind, it's a long time since I had more of them than the mule who just goes on munching his nettles: but the old woman at the bottom of the ravine was really something different. She was, truly.

A week passed and then ten days. The autumn was already in its death pangs. At nights the hedges were frosted and the moon was as cold as a stone, and solid and round and

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clear as it can only be at Christmas: and the wisps of cloud around it looked like congealed air. During the day it was better, of course, and the sunshine lasted till three: but you wouldn't catch sight of a lizard or a toad any more, much less a grass-snake: they'd already been gone some time and wouldn't come back till March. And that in itself was a bad sign. At six when you went down the street all you could smell was boiling polenta and chestnuts. The sound of the cattle-bells could now be heard from a mile away, or two, or even more. That was another rather bad sign.

The old woman was nowhere to be seen.

"Sooner or later everyone comes to me. We're not in the valley and we're not in town," said I to myself. "Especially as we're on the threshold of winter. All of them, sooner or later, end up by coming to me, don't I know it. All I've got to do is to stay put and wait. Even she will have to emerge from her lair."

By the way, I'd now begun calling her "the old crone," or "that old woman with the goat and the washing," or "the madwoman" or other even sillier names. When it thundered and pelted with rain and the water came streaming down the ravines from the mountains all I said to myself was: "Well, 'she' can't be having a very comfortable time." I'd never been like that about the others. And that was an ugly symptom too.

But things turned out unexpectedly. The autumn passed. The hedges were now no more than knots of thorns: the men were already getting their traps ready to take up to the forests on the mountain side; but the old crone never emerged from her lair.

I now did something I'd never done in my life before. I made up my mind to ask after her. I gave a couple of rabbit skins to a young fellow who acted as a sort of altar-boy and sent him off to the woods and ravines and pastures; but he picked up no news of any interest. Then I gave him a third skin and he went as far as the outskirts of Bobbio, and then I learnt what was to be known.

She lived alone on the other side of the elm path on the very edge of the parish—beyond there's nothing but the boggy ravine and worse, if worse is possible; she had come to live there recently, and without a word to anyone, from the direction of Bobbio where four years earlier the Germans had burnt everything down to the very rocks; her name was Zelinda Icci and she was the daughter of the late Primo, etc.: her sixty-third birthday had been on the eighth of August and she now washed rags and tatters from morning till night down there in the ravine for odd people in a valley village where some local industry still survived.

Every evening, as twilight fell, up she came along the hillside with her tatters and her push-cart and the goat (which she had won, apparently, in a parish lottery); at every second step, as she went along by the hedge, she would bend down to pick up dry twigs or even paper; and by the Jesus shrine she would make the sign of the cross and bow her head. Yet never once had she joined in the procession; never once had she been to vespers or even darkened the church door.

That was the gist of what I gathered.

"Excellent," said I cheerfully. "After all, we celebrate the Epiphany even at Montelice, and soon we'll be finding her a part in one of our miracle plays."

This set the boy laughing. But I wasn't really feeling very pleased.

"Now off you go, and many thanks," I said.

"And there's something else I heard . . ." he began, his laughter quite out of control.

"Off you go; hurry," I interrupted, and clapped my hands.

At that, even he realised the wind had changed, and he slipped through the door without another word. But he was a bright lad, as I've already told you; and so he gave me an ambiguous glance, both obtuse and intelligent; and that made me dislike the situation still more.

On the evening of the ninth I was busy teaching the usual things to the boys when the door burst open and in came Melide with three or four goat cheeses. She was just back from sewing an old man's winding-sheet. The bad season for the old was at hand; as soon as their death agony started Melide would be summoned: she would watch over them for a

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night or two, wash them and sew the winding-sheet, and when she came home her hands were never empty.

"There's an old woman asking for you. She's in the parlour."

"It must be the one with the goat and the push-cart," said the boy, with a knowing look.

Melide glanced at him, then at me, suspiciously. And when I got up the moment she had spoken, putting everything else to one side, she looked more suspicious than ever. She stood waiting. In her own way she was rather jealous about me: rather like servants and children, if you see what I mean.

"I know," I said, "I know" (that was the sheerest invention), "I told her to come along."

The boy looked up and stared. He was frankly out of his depth.

"Oh, so you've had a talk with her, and so——"

With a jerk I lifted him a couple of feet from the ground and carried him to the door. All the others began laughing. Melide didn't utter a word.

"And now, thank you, good night, and sleep well"—I was trying to be hearty—"I hope you'll all keep well till tomorrow morning: for the fact is, my dear children, that this evening I just don't need your company."

So off they all went, leaving me alone in the presbytery.

The passage was as dark as a chimney and the sight of the streak of light from the crack in the door made me feel like a man who owes money. There on the other side of the door the creditor is waiting, and the man doesn't know what to do for he's already spent his patrimony and all he has left is the shirt on his back and a willing pair of hands.

Nothing like this had happened to me for many a long year, and it made me think.

I heard the boys saying goodbye to one another in the street. A stone rolled down the village square. A door closed and then another. The boy who lives near the marshes went along the path, whistling.

"And now for the old woman," said I to myself.

After a pause I opened the door. There she was.

It was the first time I had had a clear view of her, and I set myself to scrutinise her closely.

Her skin was dark and wrinkled, her hair was sparrow grey, her veins harder and more protruding than a man's. And if it's possible to compare a human being to the vegetable kingdom, then an old ditch olive is what she resembled. Add to this two brass ear-rings, a black apron tied round her waist and on her feet the queerest clogs in the world. Further, she had a look in her eye like some kind of wild animal or depraved child or both at once. There you have her in a nutshell. When I saw what she looked like, I felt that boredom and fatigue had done their worst with her: all she could do was go on existing and nothing more.

I motioned her to a chair with my hand. But all she gave me was a mad smile; then she hung her head and drew near to the writing-desk.

"Look," she began, hesitating, "so far you don't even know me. . . ."

"Well," I broke in with a smile, "for some time the weather hasn't been too good for the likes of us, I admit. But I don't think we've reached that point yet."

I said this in a tone of voice that was meant to convey that for a good while I'd known all the things about her that anyone can know of another—name, address, trade, and all the rest. For what remained I was counting on her to tell me.

"I meant," she said, with a sideways look, "that I've never been seen here before in my life."

In a word she was a decent body, the humble, obstinate type if you see what I mean, and anything but easy for a priest to deal with. I thought it wouldn't do any harm in this case if I adopted a superior tone.

"Well, there's winter at the door and I've a whole heap of things to do; and for you I suppose it's even worse. What brought you to the presbytery? The important thing is to keep its address in mind. After all, it might always come in useful."

"Oh, I haven't forgotten that," she said smiling, after a pause, and repeated my very words as if drinking out of my glass. She already felt unable to unburden herself.

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"You've done the right thing. Indeed you have. Let's hope you'll be truly rewarded."

Even so she couldn't make up her mind to talk. She was just like a child, I assure you. So to make her speak her mind I thought the only thing to do was to behave as though she wasn't there. On my writing-desk stood a five- or six-year-old calendar, so I picked it up and began turning over the pages as though it was very important.

"Well," said I to myself, "so far the old crone hasn't said a thing and she might go on being prodded and probed and still say No till Doomsday. And the longer the delay the more it's a sign that the thing's important. The thing's important; that I know—I can still get that far. But I'm very afraid I won't be any use for a thing of this kind. It's altogether beyond me. . . . Anointings, holy oils, and common or garden marriages are my limit these days."

And I began thinking back to what I was like at twenty when I used to read everything and could manage to talk for two hours without stopping about some phrase from the Church fathers so that at the seminary I was known as "the Doctor Ironicus"; and all this time there was I feeling like the travelling bagman who halts at some inn on the main road only to learn he has missed his way and must turn back: but it's now late and evening is falling, the men are coming in from the fields and customers are beginning to make merry with the wine under the pergola.

"I've come to ask a question,"—she was plucking up her courage.

Even so, I wasn't going to look up. But the old crone said not a word more. She was still dallying and wouldn't come off her perch. So once more I began fingering the pages of the calendar and gazing at fishes and lambs and information about harvesting and sowing. "Let her wait another year if she wants. A priest in a hurry," I thought, "is of no more use than his old cassock."

"Well," she opened out at last, "all I wanted to ask was this. . . ."

I kept on looking at the calendar without a word. But once more she fell silent. From the mountain track there came the barking of a dog. And then of two or three dogs. And then the sound of the cow-bells. The flocks were just beginning to come down from the pastures.

"Is it true or not that even you—the Church I mean—allow two people who have married to separate, and then be free to marry anyone they like?"

A MAN can lose his temper for less than that; for much less, as I know; and the same applies to a poor priest.

I pushed the calendar aside and looked her straight in the eyes; and she can't have liked my expression very much for she immediately started gazing at her feet and smoothing and rumpling her apron, and other pointless things; and she drew back into herself just like a hedgehog when someone touches it. For days and days I had thought only of her, I had been at the ravine every evening and had even built castles in the air: and now here we were; and all that emerged was a tale to make the cat laugh all winter.

"Well, it looks as though you've begun rather late," I said, trying to be ironical.

"No, it's not that," she answered gently. "All I wanted to know was if the Church allows it. That's what I came to see you about. For instance——"

"Is this a joke? Of course the Church doesn't allow it," I interrupted with some resentment, "and you can rest assured it couldn't be more right."

"Yes, I know, I know. I realise that. The Church always says that. All priests say it. The one in Bobbio too."

"Of course. How could he fail to? And it's the same in China and Africa and wherever there's the shadow of a priest, they all say the same thing."

"Yes, and it's quite right of them to do so, quite. You are obliged to. It's nothing less than your duty. I understand you perfectly from your point of view."

What was comic was that the old woman had begun talking with a sort of air of superior complicity; and that was really the last straw; I was on the point of bursting out laughing.

"We are *obliged*. What are we *obliged* to do? That's the way it is, the fact is that's the way it

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is. It's the Church that wants it so, you get me? And it has all the reasons in the world, and has said so for a thousand years and longer still. And not even a bishop could change a hairsbreadth of it. Much less a priest."

She looked at me as though I were a baby.

"I know," she repeated softly. "I know all that as well as you. Anyway, once, long ago, I was a Child of Mary. . . . That's not it. What I mean is that they told me that sometimes there are special cases . . . that are different and then you can. You never refer to these cases in your sermons (and I do see why, it's obvious, I can see your point of view) but for all that those cases exist. They admitted that."

It was enough to make me tear my hair.

"Well yes, there are special cases," I was obliged to concede, "but they are extremely special cases, you see. And they're so few," I was back on my lost ground, "that it's as if they didn't exist. One in a hundred-thousand, in a hundred-thousand at most—even less. And if you think you have the strangest case in the world, well, you've got to take it that it isn't strange enough, that there's still some link lacking, and you won't be wrong, not in the slightest. It's an excellent rule."

"But they exist," she insisted gently and remorselessly, passing over all my explanations. "You never refer to them in your sermons, but such cases exist all the same."

"Yes, yes, Zelinda Icci, I've already said that. Extremely special cases. But it's as if they don't exist."

"And so the rule no longer applies. . . ."

"For these extremely special cases it doesn't, obviously."

"And so," she went on as if to herself, "there isn't even the slightest sin."

"So that there isn't even the slightest sin," I repeated. "And if you want to know, that too is perfectly right and proper, take my word for it. And if you want to hear something else, here it is: what you need most of all, between ourselves, is a pile of money; and it's an unending business. Get that clear; years and years. I remember one case taking twelve or thirteen. Thirteen years, Zelinda, think of that; and it's quite a long time already since you and I made our first communions."

"That's not the point," she said after a pause, with her aloof manner.

"And more money than for buying a house," I insisted.

And then something happened. My old crone looked around for a moment and then glanced at the door, straining her ear. Yes. *Something* was going to happen: there was *something* already in the air, I assure you; and suddenly, for no visible reason, I could see as clear as daylight that all her silly questions about marriage and the law and special cases and the rest of it were a mere pretext; had I taken them seriously and lost my temper, well, I would have been the sufferer. It was each for himself; so be it. And a priest would be pensioned off.

"Listen," she began, "there's something else. If we go on with the first thing it was only by way of talking. What I wanted . . ."

At that moment outside in the street you could hear the sound of cattle-bells and a rustling as of sweet-smelling herbs and water invading the whole air, and an infinity of light steppings and lowings. Black and white shadows fled past the window. There were loud barks from the watch-dogs. And so she cut short her phrase and listened to the noise and made no sign of wanting to go on.

"We were saying, Zelinda . . ." I attempted, though with very little hope.

"No. Some other time," she said hurriedly, as if begging pardon. "Now it's too late. The cows are back already and night is falling. Some other time perhaps. I'll come and see you again. For certain."

That evening, as I could see, there was nothing whatever to be gained; all I could do was to get up when she did and accompany her down as far as the consecrated ground. By now the moon had come out; but with such a cold halo that it seemed to be shivering. The air around was blue; and so were the mountain paths and the pasture grass and the ravines and the undergrowth. On the mountain road beyond the thorn hedge there was no one to be seen and it would be like that till the following morning. You could hear a child coughing and the champ of iron bits. With halter and lantern in hand, a charcoal burner was crossing the little square; he was heading his mule to the stable.

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I was as sad as a child, I tell you: I couldn't allow myself to let her go like that.

"Hey, Zelinda," I shouted, "listen a minute. Stop."

She turned back and I suddenly felt embarrassed.

"I know perfectly well that you only came up here to ask me a question—that's understood. But, Zelinda, what about me asking you one? As you see, I've answered all yours, and if you have another tomorrow you know where I live."

She waited without a word. It wasn't that she looked hostile; not at all; but she was once more playing the hedgehog.

"Zelinda," I began, when I was right up against her, "I want to be frank with you. You've been spending all your days at the bottom of the ravine washing your linen and old clothes; you don't know a soul; you never stop to speak with anyone; and when evening falls, off you hurry home. And then this evening, and all of a sudden, you take it into your head to come up and visit me, a good couple of miles over and above the five you walk every day and, well, you ask me . . . you ask me what you asked me and that's all. Well, I've acted as a farrier and a doctor and the rest in the village and there's nothing on earth that could shock me now. But this seems to me rather strange . . . a queer business."

Even then she didn't utter a word.

"Are you quite sure, Zelinda, that you have nothing else to say?"

The old woman seemed to be hesitating for a moment.

"Are you quite sure," I tried to insist, "that you've really asked me everything?"

"Yes, yes," she answered, rather uneasily, "that was all I wanted to know—whether, even with you, it would be possible not to bother about the law; and whether the law might not apply to everyone. I'd thought it out by myself. It wasn't right, I thought, for the law to apply to everyone. Sometimes it oughtn't to apply; obviously; where would justice be if that weren't so? But I'm glad I've heard it from one of you. Said by you it's another matter. It's different. Good night."

"Good night," said I.

I leant with one arm against the apple tree in the churchyard and followed her awhile with my eyes.

She went on her way slowly and I should say with difficulty, for some time elapsed before she reached the corner of the path. At the turning her disappearance was sudden: first her person and then, after a pause, her shadow; but the tapping of her clogs reached my ears for several minutes afterwards.

When I could hear nothing more whatsoever, I turned and re-entered the presbytery.

Of course, the old crone gave no sign of life at the presbytery, either next day or afterwards.

In addition I couldn't get half an hour free to go down to her stream. It's not easy to describe the life of a mountain priest. Some months of the year—November, for instance—the people need a farrier, a doctor (even an inexperienced one will do) and then a postman and a barber to do all the odd jobs that the postman or barber usually manage to do alone. And now November was upon us.

The queer thing about the whole affair is this. Each day I thought more and more about the old crone and I began to feel a kind of embarrassment and shyness that I hadn't experienced for at least thirty years, delicate feelings that were almost comic. If you try, up in the mountains, to eat with a knife and fork, or speak good Italian, or merely shake a woman's hand, people immediately draw into their shells. Normally the most you get is a nod when your elbow grazes them in the street as you pass; you can't expect anything more than that.

They were already looking at me suspiciously as they look at the English when they talk. And in the Confessional it was worse. I talked and talked and then I would suddenly have to stop and start translating my words.

"But of course," I told myself, as the altar-boy took off my boots one after the other and I could at last sit down: "It's as clear as daylight. The question about marriage and all the other silly questions aren't what she wants to know. That's obvious. And only a poor old fool of a priest like you could take that seriously for a

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moment. Just stop and think—if you're still capable of thinking. A woman of sixty and over who does what she does and spends her day by the river washing rags and walks five miles each day to carry them back to the valley, and goes on doing the same every day of the year, a woman who hasn't even a dog or a dead relative and never bids good day to a soul and no one bothers about, obviously she must have something on her mind. And naturally she comes to ask you, a decent fellow and the only one in miles with a dog-collar and in charge of God's board and lodging. Anyone else would have tumbled to it ages ago. Think of the priest at Braino and just imagine."

The next day I found myself thinking the very opposite.

"All right. From now on I'll leave the old mole in peace. I'll brush the thought of her from my mind and forget her."

That same evening she turned up.

It was dark and the moon had already risen; the mountains and hedges and roads and gravestones (all except the woods, which were nothing but a waste of undergrowth) looked brighter than in daylight. It wasn't yet seven but the old women were already indoors slicing the bread.

Behind the arbour of the old inn I thought I espied some shadows. They were hopping round the already leafless undergrowth and plainly waiting for someone; even if a thief had been found in the vestry he wouldn't have looked so suspicious. Then from Valico way came a strange whistle. A further shadow came pelting headlong and disappeared in the undergrowth; they were all crouching in the darkness.

I am only averagely curious, but I have often looked out of my window for less reason than this; a single thief is only a single thief, a couple are no more than a couple, but six or seven nocturnal shadows plunging behind a bush begin to make you think. Besides, we live in tricky times.

So I extinguished my light, opened the window and stood watching.

A minute passed and then another. Even the moon seemed to be on the watch. In the silence you could hear the sound of the water and the crackle of some dead wood and all the innumerable noises of unknown origin which seem to emerge from the heart of the night and the mountains. Another minute went slowly by. Suddenly came a sound of footsteps on the path. I rose on tiptoe and got a better view from the window. At the corner of the mountain road appeared a goat, a push-cart and an old crone.

Unexpectedly six or seven boys burst out from behind the arbour with empty tins and lids and tin plates and other refuse that you find where there have been picnics, and from the opposite hedge there sprang three others. Howling and battering their tin cans they formed a dancing circle round her. And then they formed into a procession behind her.

The goat was driven crazy: it kicked, it butted with head and horns, and tried to drag away the rope: at one moment it would be standing stock-still in the middle of the road, at another making a long bound forward. As for the old crone, all she did was to keep straight on with her cart and her tatters without uttering a word or turning round once; exactly like a lizard whose one idea is to escape to safety in the ditch.

I couldn't make it out. I watched and listened but couldn't make it out.

They had now drawn near and I could see their faces. Widow Sante's stepson threw a fistful of bits of paper, confetti, or something like that over her shoulders and began shouting something. I listened as hard as I could but the tin cans and lids made such a din that I could only hear little snatches.

"Confetti . . . confetti," they bellowed, laughing, "long live the bride. . . . Confetti."

And then everything became clear.

"And now of course I can see what's afoot," thought I to myself. "Obviously Melide is behind it all. She was behind the door listening that day and worked it all out in her mind and got the celebration ready accordingly."

Well. Foolery of that sort isn't especially uncommon up here. At bottom they're all a bit uncivilised. If anyone is the slightest bit different from the rest and lives his own life and doesn't come to drink in the sheds at Christmas

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time, well, one evening, sooner or later, they'll be sure to shear off his nanny-goat's beard.

Nothing worse than the beard, of course.

But I was already thinking of the following day.

I waited till they drew still nearer.

"Hey, there, boys," I shouted, when they were beneath the window, "you just wait for a minute, my fine fellows. Wait for the cream of the joke. The bridegroom is just arriving."

And I pretended to set out downstairs. Down below there was wild disorder and a mad scamper along lanes and behind hedges, the tin cans rolling away on every side. The group had dispersed in a second. And neither slowly nor quickly my old crone disappeared round the corner.

It was light—there was a very cool, clear light and I could see everything; here and there on her hair and shoulders there still stuck some bits of the paper. It would have needed only a slight shake of the head for them all to fall off, you see. And she didn't do even that. What a strange affair. She took no notice of them whatever and that was that; just as she took no notice of me watching at the window as she went by and disappeared.

She was the silliest creature on earth.

"Tomorrow for the ravine," I said to myself, almost cheerfully. "Perhaps I'll never have such a good opportunity again. Really, that old woman ought to show her gratitude. She must. Even a dog would do that."

After a while I ceased to hear her footsteps. A lantern flared in the darkness. Down below was the rushing stream. The lantern was extinguished.

Under the moon the world was clean and peaceful and fresh as far as the bottom of the valley and beyond.

"Tomorrow for the ravine," thought I.

They say that opportunities like that make young men and girls feel gay.

So next day I sent off my boys half an hour before time, or even more, and set out towards the ravine.

There she was.

I stopped by the edge about ten yards above her head. She must have seen me coming from the bend onwards at least, but before giving any sign that she had noticed me she thought it good to keep me standing in her waiting-room. I greeted her from up there with a nod of the head; and she did the same to me from down below. But nothing more than that—is that clear? Only a nod of her head. Then she resumed her washing.

That's all there was doing, and it was no use singing and expecting a second penny; it now remained for me to return home. And this same thing happened for three or four consecutive days. I would arrive at the top of the cliff; I would halt and hang around in the waiting-room; she would at last make up her mind to lift her head (the joke was that she always did this as if by chance); I would greet her, she would greet me, and then off I'd go home again.

It was really quite absurd.

"There's no hurry, no hurry," said I to myself. "Sunday comes on the seventh day. That's why it's called a feast day."

Then something did happen.

The rains had already begun. The air was pregnant with the scent of fresh grass; every morning beneath the trees you found clusters of drowned sparrows; the water in the torrent had risen some feet and already many of the flat stones were being washed over and submerged. Hence, for her laborious washing, the old crone had to move three hundred yards downstream in the direction of the valley. When I reached the usual spot, I couldn't see her, and was on the point of going home.

"Let's hope now that she doesn't take it into her head to give Melide some extra work," thought I. A stone rolled down into the water and at that moment I caught sight of her, in her new place, almost hidden by the branches.

It was a real signal of mutual understanding; a message according to all the rules. And even today, in all conscience, I can't say I've ever received a present worth a quarter of that. My old crone had summoned me, there was no doubting it, and this time I had enough sense to realise that a summons like that doesn't need answering.

Never drink up the dregs in your glass, my friends. I didn't pause for even half a minute.

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It was evening; the torrents were roaring down; the stream in the ravine was sweeping along the branches of trees and, now and again, blocks of mud.

I turned back home.

I WANT to put it in a nutshell. The days passed without her giving the slightest indication of any desire to come off her perch: and things might have gone on like that for ever. So I decided to beard her in her lair.

By this time I was always peeping at the clouds and sniffing the air to see if the smell of drenched roots was beginning to grow less. And Melide was watching my every movement. She simply couldn't hold herself back. Then the sky cleared a bit.

"Good," said I to myself, for before making a move you like to have a reason and nobody likes being ridiculous. "If it's your job to worry about everyone you might as well begin by worrying about someone—just a single solitary person. But worry about that person deeply down to the very roots. There's no better way of getting seriously concerned about everyone else as well. Otherwise, my fine gentleman, you might as well save your shoeleather; for all else that remains is a landscape."

True, there's nothing here to boast about. Yet I can think of quite a lot of people who have dropped out long before reaching even this point.

The rain had now ceased. The women had put their stoves back on their doorsteps and the fowls were back in the road; some of them even came into the presbytery. By the middle of the morning the sun emerged. But a pale and timid sun; not one to be trusted.

Now came the hitch; after twelve days of rain this was a day for visitors. They began around eight o'clock.

The first to come were the six oldest shepherds in the village about the business of our miracle play. There could be no more talk of *Gerusalemme* that year; not to speak of *Orlando at Paris*. The swords had been confiscated by the Germans during the war, we were a breastplate short and so on. Besides, we had neither money nor time. So far so good. But could I suggest some other piece that didn't require such things? And above all something short? And with very few parts? One of their company had died in September; he had played King Charlemagne and Judas and so on and was the best actor on the whole mountain side; but the fact remained that he had died in September. To discuss all this the six of them had come all the way from the marshes on the borders of Bobbio.

I couldn't think of anything offhand. That day my mind was taken up with something else.

"Of course, the *Gerusalemme* is really what we need," I said, to gain time. I cast my eye through the window; the sun was just going in in a halo of blue clouds like flies round a jampot.

They nodded. And now the sun had gone in and the room was darker than a cinema. The six old men were still waiting.

"And besides, it attracts a crowd of people," I added, rather absently. My eyes were still fixed on those blue clouds. After all, there was always the possibility that they would pass over. All that was needed was a breath of wind, if that.

The six old men stared at one another.

"People came from the valley and even from the opposite slope," said one.

"Especially, your Reverence, as it's five years since we had our last play up here," said the man who lived by the marshes.

"Of course . . . the war," I said, only to keep the conversation going. The room was beginning to light up a little. Perhaps the sun would still manage to win through: all that was needed was a breath of wind, no more. I managed to take a look out westwards. "Why not try *I Reali di Francia*? That isn't at all bad either?"

There was a short consultation—the six old men discussed in low voices and then one of them spoke up for the others.

"Yes, but what about our swords? We need five and even that isn't enough. And then the clothes and armour? And the women? There are three women in that play and, worse, two of them are young girls. Where can we find young girls nowadays?"

I fell silent. They followed suit, still searching

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one another's eyes. Then all the others turned to the one from the bogs near Bobbio.

"You see, your Reverence, what we need is a rather short piece," the one from the Bobbio marshes began explaining patiently. "A piece for six or seven of us, or even fewer. We've got to face up to it, we've no more swords. And besides, Grisante went and died in September."

"Listen," said I, absentmindedly, "do you think the weather will hold?"

They all looked out of the window.

"We might get a St. Martin's summer as things stand. There's always a week of fine weather at that time."

"No, I didn't mean that. I meant today. I was wondering whether we mightn't have an autumn storm today."

Now when they get beyond seventy these shepherds sprout beards like saints and their eyes are clearer and bluer than a babe's so that when they look straight into you you always feel guilty; whereas the truth is that they have more intuition than cats and you can never manage to conceal anything from them.

They had scented something. They were obviously on to something. They threw their cloaks over their shoulders and made off in a huff. It was the first time that this had happened to me for thirty years, since the time I first came to the mountain; and I disliked it.

I watched them from the window on their way along the path to the pastures. They proceeded in single file, keeping by the ditch, and one after another they drew from beneath their cloaks the goat cheeses they had brought along for me. They went on climbing for a good distance and then they gathered together. It looked like a conspiracy. The one from the Bobbio marshes was the first to go on his way. The others followed behind him. They disappeared on the left.

"That's not the way to the marshes," said Melide, who was standing next to me. "For the marshes you have to turn right. They're not going back home, those fellows."

I turned towards her.

"No, they're going down to Braino," she insisted, with a note of contempt in her voice. "They're quite capable of going down to Braino and asking the advice of the priest there."

That too was the first time in thirty years.

"Oh, well, I've never liked goat cheese," I said evasively.

She gave me a curious look.

"It has something coarse about it," I said.

So be it. That too was now the past.

With two shirts, a new collar, and a cotta worn twice, if that, and some other oddments, I managed to put together a bundle that more than passed muster; I fixed a stick of ash into it and tried it out on my shoulder.

"Someone's waiting for you in the other room," announced Melide, who had come in at that moment and was standing watching me. I felt thoroughly awkward; there was no harm, of course, in what I was doing, but I was cutting a ridiculous figure.

I put down the bundle and went into the parlour.

Awaiting me were two leaders of the Children of Mary from Grappada down in the valley. They had come about a project that was older than me—a pilgrimage to Oropa or Loreto or both that, partly through my fault, was always being postponed till next year and was now at last due to be carried out. This they repeated; that it was now at last due to be carried out, there was no question of it; the list of participants had already been drawn up. Well, perhaps not all; my list, for instance, was still lacking. On the mountains people were beginning to murmur—nothing serious, only whispers. At least that was all so far—it was best to be frank. Did I know all this? Did I understand?

They were very queer birds. Their eyes were downcast and their lips were pursed as if everyone and everything offended them, me above all; they looked for all the world like two Reproaches incarnate. But all I minded was to keep my eyes on that patch of sunshine. It came, then suddenly went, and then after a while reappeared again—as though it were already in a death agony and only held out to please me.

My two visitors made me feel I was only about eighteen. I kept on saying Yes. How

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could I do otherwise? Of course, of course. It would definitely take place this year and I had even thought up an excellent itinerary.

Icily they ignored my point, and asked rather stiffly:

"Yes, but what about the servants?"

I turned and stared at them as if I had only just woken up.

"I'm sorry, but what about the servants?"

Their lips became even tighter.

"The question was," they deigned to say patiently, "whether we can accept all ex-servants or only those who've been in service for a minimum of twenty years."

"Oh, well, all of them I should say. That seems to me the best."

Their eyes met in consultation for a moment. Suddenly under their noses there appeared a fleeting something that, with people of their sort, can perhaps be taken for a half-smile of understanding. I could sense the vague presence of a trap.

"Yes, it could be done, it could be done," they admitted, with excessive deference; "but in that case we'd need at least three more buses. Perhaps even four. But if you can procure them for us, that is, if it's within your power. . . ."

Nothing of the kind was within my power, as was obvious, and they knew it as well as I did. They watched me with silent composure so as to enjoy the result. They had a stuffed look.

"Then . . . then only those over thirty. Yes, perhaps that's better . . . those over thirty."

They looked sorry for me, as though I were an incomprehensible idiot. And then they looked at one another again. The sun was betwixt and between; more clouds were sweeping over from the mountains; and I was beginning to feel thoroughly discouraged. I leant further back in my chair, shamelessly placid.

"Well, my dear children," I said, feigning a slight yawn, "till we meet again at Loreto or at Oropa or maybe in both places. It's up to you to organise a fine show, isn't it? Now, alas, I have a great mass of things on hand; and so, if you'll allow me, I'll get back to work."

I knew I was handing them the baby, but by so doing I managed to pack off two pious old hens at a trot. The last glimpse I had of them was of four matchstick legs and two hats crowned with cloth fruit, and even the hats looked annoyed.

I didn't like that particularly, either.

"A queer day," I thought, "all in all, a queer day."

"What day is it?" I asked Melide.

"Wednesday, November the sixth," she answered.

Wednesday, November the sixth. All in all, a very queer day. Exceptional.

"It looks as though we're losing customers," I said, with an attempt at a joke. But my voice was rather forced. Some things are always disagreeable and no one likes them.

Melide had something on the tip of her tongue. She looked at my bundle and didn't utter a word.

I slung it over my shoulder and went out.

I LEFT the houses and the pond behind me, then the inn, then the graveyard and the marshes; and soon I was alone with only the brushwood of the ravines around me, and ahead some rough grazing land with the precipitous wall of the mountains as background.

After a couple of hours I reached the splintered rock where once upon a time the shepherd was killed by the seven brothers: and after a further half-hour I reached my destination.

The first thing I saw, some thirty yards below me, was her nanny-goat; this was already more than I had hoped for when I set out.

The sun was now setting; the ravines below looked red and rusty and the air was already bluish. Anyone who didn't know that Bobbio lay beyond would think he had reached the confines of the world.

And there I saw my old crone.

She was sitting on the steps of her house weaving, though she had no eye for her spindle and thread and was surely thinking of one thing only; like the conscript in detention on a festival day who leans his head against the bars and fails to notice even the crowds strolling up and down two yards below him until night falls.

"At last a proper meeting," said I to myself.

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"There's not a soul about and anyway it's supper time; the silence must weigh quite heavily on her too. This time she'll surely come down from her perch."

And I mounted the slope. But the old crone must have heard me. All of a sudden, without even looking up, she rose to her feet, gathered up her spindle and basket, gave a tug to the rope of the goat who was grazing in the hedgerow, and within a few seconds had disappeared behind the door. By the steps, there remained a pair of clogs, and that was all. There I stood, with my bundle and my stick, staring at them.

I was still anxious not to make the cat laugh, especially as I sensed—and how I sensed it!—that she was listening inside the little entrance: so without more ado I set out on my road home again.

The blue tones of nightfall were already rolling down from the mountain cliffs and from the pastures. Nothing can be worse than being alone at that time of day. You are a prey to uneasy thoughts and your body is invaded by memories. "Is this all there is?" you find yourself asking; so that a man ceases even to be a man. Yet within half an hour I heard the screeching of a cart. As I might have foreseen, it was the tailor. At that time and place it couldn't have been anyone else. He was on his way back from his last round of visits before the closing in of winter. I stopped and waited. There he came.

As in his time he had been in Savoy and his woman's work involved a lot of travelling, his manners were just like a Frenchman's; he paid me a whole heap of polite compliments and *bonjours* and then invited me into his cart.

"Don't start tempting me," said I.

He made the kind of gesture you get from the gentry.

"You'd be the first today," he said. "In the whole of my round I've failed to tempt a single soul. No, I've found no one at all, not even a woman."

"Well, first we'd have to see what our good friend here thinks about it," said I, pointing to his ass.

"Oh, but consecrated flesh has no weight," said he, for he had a polite phrase for every occasion. And he made room for me in his cart.

We didn't utter a word for a long while. It was night, one couldn't discern a single house, our clothes were drenched and we looked worse than a couple of widows. I had been behaving like a gipsy and he was in as bad a condition as I.

"Not even a single jacket," he observed of a sudden, with a bitter laugh, "I haven't managed to sell a single jacket all day. And I went right down into the wilds."

"They all have soldiers' jackets," I said, "they're very useful in winter."

"All right, all right; that is, if I must say something," said he, "but in that case why on earth do they make me talk for half an hour each time? That's all I ask. Why make me turn out everything I've got? In France and in Savoy they don't do that to you."

He had turned to stare at me. He seemed really offended and as if awaiting my answer.

"I see what you mean," I said wearily. "I can understand your point of view. But they find it amusing. And it must be admitted that they haven't many other amusements."

"And above all it costs them nothing. That's marvellous—I never thought of that. It's enough to make you laugh." He was now being rather hostile.

"It's cold already," I said, to change the subject.

I could feel his eyes on me even more sharply than before. He was, so to speak, giving me a professional once-over. For a while we remained silent, he with his eyes glued on me. "She's raving mad . . . what a dotty woman," I was thinking.

"Listen," said he, nudging my elbow, "there are town priests I know of who wear proper breeches under their soutanes. They are gay fellows and up to date. Especially as no one knows it."

He waited, smiling. I made no rejoinder. "I wonder if she went out to fetch the clogs," I was thinking to myself.

"For riding a bicycle, I mean," he put in hurriedly; "and, come to think of it, they're quite right. It must be much more comfortable, mustn't it? For instance, when they're summoned out at night."

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"Yes, in town . . . there may well be some in town."

Once more he turned his eyes on me.

"Ah yes; but not only in town. In the hills too, unless I'm very much mistaken."

"Am I wrong, or isn't this the village?" said I, for I wanted to escape.

With unexpected dignity the little man pulled up his ass by the bridle. He had turned abruptly into someone else.

"Here we are. I'm home," said he, drily dismissing me, and forthwith bent down to remove the lantern. "Eh, eh, we've worn you out today"—he now became polite to his ass—"we've broken your back, eh?"

"Good night. I'm home too," said I.

I crossed the cobbled square. My footsteps could have been heard as far as Bobbio. In a stall a dog barked.

As soon as I got to the presbytery the boy told me that the old woman had called that afternoon and delivered two candles and a letter; then she had gone down to the ravine and later had returned and removed the letter.

"And here are her candles," Melide broke in. She was unable to take her eyes off my stick and bundle for a single moment. But now all I could think about was the letter; there was no room for anything else in my mind; about why she had written it and what on earth it could have contained and why she had come to remove it again: and even if I had been barefoot I wouldn't have paid much attention to Melide.

"So she brought a letter?" I asked the boy again.

He intimated that that was so.

"And then, later, she came back and removed it?"

"It would have been round about four," he explained.

I tried to make a mental calculation.

"So that the moment I had set out . . ."

The boy nodded.

Both of them had their eyes fixed on me. They were obviously waiting for something or other.

"Very good," said I at length; "I haven't had a bite since two, so if there's any food I would greatly appreciate something to eat."

All the same, I was fated to run into her a little while later. One night it was.

It had been raining all day and raining in a way that only happens around here. Not a single shepherd had had the heart to set out; they were all sitting behind closed doors weaving straw baskets or chairs, preparing chestnuts for the cold weather or making traps to set in the woods. The gullies were already grey with water, the stream in the ravine was overflowing, the water was pouring in streams from the broken eaves and there was not a hen or a dog or a mole to be seen from the cobbled square to the bottom of the valley.

I opened the window. The room was invaded by gusts of rain and the smell of drenched grass.

"No, indeed. No one could call this a good day for *her*," said I, and shut the window with a bang. "And tomorrow will be still worse and it will go on and on like this for at least three months. And unless she has to hand a whole heap of letters to write to me and then take away again, I expect the old woman will have anything but a happy Christmas."

All day it went on pouring down; and then as dusk began to fall, the rain stopped; and by the time the lanterns were lit in the mangers the moon had deigned to peep out; not round, of course, as in August, but treacherous; and as fresh and clean as if it had just been taken out of a wash-bucket; and the mountains, with their whitened crests, the pasturelands, the graveyard, and the woods down below on the other side of the valley, were spread out before my eyes larger than life-size. The whole landscape was blue and icy, with here and there a dash of silver.

A shot resounded from somewhere near Valico, followed shortly afterwards by two more. The sound spread in ever-widening waves over the whole mountainside. Then little by little it descended valleywards.

It was the first time in more than four years that anything of the kind had been heard in the whole region: the war was now a thing of the past. It aroused the whole village. All around you could hear the stamping and braying of mules, babies crying at being suddenly awoken and people getting out of bed and

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coming to the door to listen. But no one drew his bolt or looked out into the street or shouted from the window to ask what it was.

And that's how I was, too, still only half dressed and unable to make up my mind to go out; I got up and went to the door, then returned to bed again, then stood in the middle of the room trying to pull on my boots.

Some time elapsed. Possibly long. I managed to pull on one boot and then the other. Then I peeped into the street to have a look.

Every door was open; the light of candles and torches on crossbeams now spread to the middle of the street. Here and there a woman, half dressed and with her youngest baby in her arms, appeared on top of her doorstep. One was throwing empty pillow-cases down to her husband in the street below. Without even slowing down to tie up his trousers a young man with a halter ran off along the mountain path. They all had buckets or other containers in their hands, and the boys had caps. Some even a couple.

"Ho there, you people, wait a minute! What's happening?" I shouted from my doorway.

But off they all went; including a solitary old woman and a whole family–father, mother and son, as on the last night of Troy. I couldn't imagine what it was all about. Then one of the boys arrived at a run; and everything became clear.

Four mules laden with flour had been going down by the Valico track alongside the oak forest. But there was no moon and it was raining; and as a wood is a wood and night is night the *carabinieri* had begun shooting. As a result, two of the mules had run amok and made off in different directions towards the ravines, the wilderness and the marshes; and at least twenty bushels of flour had been scattered over the neighbouring area. So everyone was dashing off to make a haul.

"You'd better be quick," said the silly boy, rushing off again. "By now they must be picking it up with spoons."

"Indeed," said I to myself, "and why shouldn't I? When it rains it rains on me, as it does on everyone else."

And soon afterwards there I was on my way. But, of course, I was thinking of something different.

By now there was not a soul in the road: the people with their pillow-cases had already reached the flour. One by one the candles were extinguished. By the time I had got to the mountain path hope was about evens.

And then what should happen when I reached the dead ash than that I should see my old crone. She too had her apron full and was almost hidden in the shadows cutting across the pathway. Without hesitating I drew to her side.

"Here we are again," I began, with a dim attempt at jocularity. "Well, this time you didn't come to ask about the rules. You must know all the rules in this case."

And I pointed to the flour. My old crone withdrew into her shell. She was as frightened as a mouse.

"Don't worry; I was only joking; wait," said I, taking her by the elbow, "I have come to get *my* letter, that's all."

As ill-luck would have it we had already reached the hedge in front of her house; and all that I could reasonably hope from an old woman like her was that she should say a conventional goodbye and leave me to go on my way. Moreover, that's what she had already done once. True, her door was really ridiculous, hardly stronger than the kind we use for pig-styes, and I could easily have broken it down only using my left hand; but that didn't signify.

"Here I am," she said of a sudden, as I had foreseen, "here's my house."

"I know," said I, "I came to serenade you five or six days ago, towards evening."

"I'm very grateful to you and please forgive me for the trouble and all. And good night to you."

"Good night, my foot," said I, in a boisterous voice, "and as for my trouble, I wouldn't dream of forgiving you. That would be too easy, don't you think?"

She gave me the most fleeting of glances, not being sure whether she had understood.

"It's all been going on too long," I explained. "You must admit it's been going on too long."

"I've only come twice to bother you at the

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presbytery," she answered, trying to wriggle out of my grasp. "No, not even twice, only once. The second time I didn't even find you in. . . . Good night, and please forgive me for everything."

I decided on a new tack.

"All this is nothing but soft soap and the like. It's all very well for eighteen-year-olds, they seem to enjoy it; but for us it's different," said I. "I've come to get my letter. *My* letter, Zelinda, is that clear?"

I was anxious to get it into her head without delay that I had no intention of going away. I would have stayed there an hour or even two. I would have waited the whole day with her had it been necessary. Even longer still if absolutely obliged. Did she understand? With this in mind I drew out my handkerchief and spread it out carefully, without a shadow of haste, and sat myself down on the steps of the house, the place where they light the stove during the winter. "I know I'm behaving like a goatherd and I like it even less than you do. But facts are facts. That letter is already mine, if you want to know, just as much as my books or my table; and even a town lawyer or magistrate would agree that it is mine by right. You can take that on oath, I assure you. And if I hadn't rushed off to your house that day I would have read it on the spot and there wouldn't have been any need for us both to hang about here on the doorstep. Among other things, it's beginning to get cold."

There she stood staring at me with her head bent, two feet away or even less. She was still holding up her apron with her mite of flour in it and we looked an odd couple, there's no denying it.

"You're right," she decided at long last, her eyes on the ground. "But I think I'm right too. You see it's like this. It takes three or four days to think of something; then I go down into the valley to buy salt, paper, and ink; then I send you the letter and it contains everything. And the whole business is over. But then, when I get to the ravine I turn the thing over and over again in my mind and see that the letter is no use, and so then I go back to the presbytery and remove the letter. And the first thing I do is to throw it into the water."

"Oh, the water of the stream seems made to arouse interminable thoughts about this and that. And the work you do makes it worse still. That's the way it is. But *what* were you thinking? It's dark, Zelinda, and there's no one around save you and me; both of us have one foot in the grave; and so we can surely talk things over."

She hesitated for a second.

"What was I thinking of by the stream? When I tell you, you'll be angry, I know it."

I gave my shoulders an imperceptible shrug.

"You know you don't believe that, Zelinda."

"I was thinking," said she, "that there are some things you can't understand. Of course, other people can't either. Only the others never get angry."

"That's as may be. No one contradicts you." Again I tried to smile. In her own way the old woman really took the cake. She was passive, obstinate, and calm, and a host of other things that I wouldn't even be able to describe. There wasn't much chance of getting anything out of her; logic, theology and all that were no more than blunted forks. "Some things can be understood in the end, others never under any circumstances. It's exactly like a doctor who has been studying everything for years and years, even Latin; and then the time comes when even he can't do anything except sit by the bedside of the dying man. Yet," I concluded, feeling rather pleased with my comparison, "it's good to go to the doctor. Everyone goes to be examined by the doctor."

"I don't," she said gently. "I've never been. Even when the charcoal-burner's mule kicked me here in the back I didn't go to the doctor. I put some herbs on it."

Of course, this wasn't reasoning. But it was all I could get and besides you have to take the bad with the good.

"For all that," I repeated, "you did write that letter. And that evening you did come to see me. To see the doctor. . . . You can say what you like, Zelinda, that shows that on this occasion you couldn't find the herbs you needed. So you see; that's all I wanted to say; that when you're looking for something, two heads are better than one—that's all."

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This time I obviously must have hit the bulls-eye, for the old crone made no answer; and from someone of her kind even silence was more than I had hoped for.

By now, on the mountain road, on the hedges and slopes around it, and the under-brush and the pastures, all was still and the birds and the frogs and all other creatures were sleeping; and I suddenly got a feeling as if what we were saying could be heard even there below in the depths of the valley where the villages are large and there is electric light and so on, and people never go to bed before midnight. And then it struck me that this talk of wild herbs and the couple of us searching for them as you do for mushrooms was grotesque; and then I thought of all the convincing arguments I would have been able to think up thirty years ago or even earlier, when I read every evening and discussed things and life still lay ahead. Then I began thinking of what she must have been like in those days when she returned home in the evening from a dance and had young men to serenade her beneath the fig-tree in the garden; and she peeping out of the window with heaven knows what wild thoughts. In those days there would never be a night when she would be sitting like this on her doorstep and talking with an old mountain priest. No, two good people hadn't been born with silver spoons in their mouths. But we get what we get and that's that.

"But if you go on like this perhaps we'll never understand each other," I urged, the iron being still hot. "That, or worse, was what Olivieri used to say. Once under my very eyes, to make his daughter-in-law understand, he unhitched his strap and laid her out on the table. That'll give you an idea of the sort of fellow he was. After that there was understanding all right. Understanding all round, I can tell you. And it was the same with Sante, the widower, when they came to tell me that he was laying it on his daughter too much; and it was the same with more men and women than I could count."

"But for me it's different," she said, as though talking to herself. "There's not the faintest comparison."

"We're all different, true enough," I countered, with all the self-confidence in the world. And I added not another word. My old crone was beginning to be seriously perturbed. It was a good sign. And now the best for me was to wait silently, staring at my feet.

"Supposing every morning you got up at five and went down into the valley to collect people's oddments," she began, after a pause, "then had a moment at midday to eat some bread and oil on the grass by a ditch, then climbed the mountain to get the push-cart and go to the stream and work. Till six, till seven, and on Mondays till nine in the evening. And then you loaded the cart and came back to the house just in time to eat some more oil and bread with a salad of dandelion leaves; and then you went to bed."

She was breathing with difficulty. She was obviously in a state of deep distress about herself.

"And suppose you did the same the next day, and the day after, and all the days in the world. For that I know to be the truth; I know it, I know it absolutely; for all the days in the world. Even you can't deny that."

She broke off to get her breath, for she had never spoken like that in all her born days I could have sworn. I stared and stared and uttered not a word.

"I've a nanny-goat that I always take about with me; my life is her life, one is like the other. She comes down into the valley, she comes up again at midday, she stays by the ditch with me and then I take her to the stream and when I go to sleep she goes to sleep too. And there isn't even much difference in what we eat, for when she eats grass I eat dandelion leaves; the only difference is the bread. Then there are times when I'm not even able to eat that. . . . She's exactly like me, exactly. So you see what I do—I lead a goat's life. Only she . . . how long does a goat live?"

"A goat? You mean how long does a goat live?" said I, taken aback, "well, not more than twenty years."

"That's it. Twenty years and no more. The difference is that her life ends much much sooner. I'm sixty-three this winter."

They were bitter words; and I felt obliged to say something. So I rose and stood close to

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her, for I obviously couldn't talk while I was sitting on her steps like someone who had gone out for fresh air and to smoke a pipe.

"Was this what you put in your letter, Zelinda?"

"No," she said, once more unexpected. "No. Everyone knows all this, every passer-by. It would be unnecessary to write all this."

I was now beginning to disappoint her I could see.

"That wasn't what you wrote? Then what was it? Now you've begun with the story, Zelinda, why not tell me everything—for I'm here to help you."

"No, no," she said, hesitant, "you can't understand. With me everything is different. I used to belong to the Children of Mary, I have even been on a pilgrimage to Loreto—the whole way on foot; I've done what God tells us to do and no one can say anything against me. By and large I've never done anything wrong."

"Of course not," I tried to break in, though without interrupting her, "that's as clear as crystal."

"And I was thinking that God might be able to do me a good turn in exchange. I've never asked him for anything. I've never bothered him in the whole of sixty-three years. And I've never lost patience with him; not even once. Not even when the mule kicked me on to a cairn of rocks or when the boys hid half my washing for a joke and I had to pay for it in extra work. At the time I didn't know it was a joke, either. I thought he might do me a good turn, that's all."

She stopped again, for she was now thoroughly agitated; and I went on gazing at her without uttering a word.

"That was why I came to see you that evening—to ask you if even you—I mean the Church—sometimes shuts its eye to the rule. The part about marriage was only a trick. Then I felt ashamed the whole night."

"But I realised all that in less than three minutes."

"Yet you were angry."

"I realised about three minutes after that, Zelinda. And if I didn't understand at the very first moment it was because I, too, have become a sort of cab-horse, that's the fact of the matter. But as for understanding, well, as I've told you, I do understand; and, to tell the truth, that was why I called you back."

"Yes, in front of the presbytery, I know. But that was easy to understand. That could be understood straight away. But what the letter said, you Church people would never understand—nor would other people, for that matter—and you wouldn't say Yes for all the money in the world."

"Don't say that, Zelinda," said I, with a change of tone, for I was beginning to have an icy feeling in my scalp and down my spine. And my nose was smarting as if someone was tugging out my hair. "Every question has its answer, take it from me: everything depends on knowing how to look for it. All you have to do is to state your question."

"The trouble is your answer will be No," she said, weakening considerably, and by now I had begun to realise that she wanted to tell me everything but lacked confidence in her own words and was really rather like a naughty child. "I feel it already."

But I uttered never a word; I persisted in my silence for I realised that she was now going to tell me everything.

"So you really want to know what was in the letter?" she asked.

I merely nodded.

"All right," she decided. "Then I'll tell you. But you must turn away and stop looking at my face."

So I did what she said and turned my face to the wall, I swear it, as when someone is undressing. And it never occurred to me for a moment that if anyone had seen us in that position they would have had a good laugh at our expense.

Anyway, it was her doing.

"WRITTEN in the letter was that I didn't want to offend God in any way, nor grumble at him, it goes without saying. I hadn't the remotest intention of doing either of those things. Also was written that I fully understood what you priests say, and woe and betide if things were otherwise, and who knows what would happen to the world. That

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I realised. But seeing that mine was a special case. . . . No, please, don't begin turning round; you promised. . . . As mine was really a special case and quite different from the others, and I know it will always be so and every day that passes will be worse (for this I know, I know it truly, it's the only thing I do really know). Then without disrespect for anyone I asked. . . . No, I can already imagine what you'll answer."

"Without disrespect for anyone. . . ."

"Well, in the letter it was written whether in any special case, one quite different from others, and without disrespect for anyone, a person could be allowed to finish a little sooner. . . ."

I turned round though I hadn't quite understood.

"Yes . . . if one could kill oneself," she explained with all the calm of a child.

And it was her turn to start looking at her clogs.

All this so took me by surprise that for a moment I couldn't utter a word. Words simply wouldn't come. Not a single word. No, that wouldn't be putting it exactly; on the tip of my tongue I had floods of words, counsel, advice, "for heaven's sake" and "what are you saying" and pages of sermons and the rest of it. But only other people's ideas; things of the past, things that had been said over and over and over again. I hadn't a single word of my own; and that was what was precisely needed, something fresh and genuinely mine; anything else would be worse than useless.

"There you are," she said, after a while, "I knew you'd be like that."

Worst of all she stood there waiting, for something like a minute or even longer. She waited, still hoping.

"I knew you'd be like that," she repeated, in the same tone of voice. "I always knew it. I said it to myself from the very beginning."

"Zelinda," I began, but so clumsily that I felt ashamed of myself and of all the words in the world.

"So why did you want to know so badly?" she went on, with a hint of reproof. "You wanted to know, and now you behave like this."

And she turned and disappeared into the house, leaving me outside her ridiculous door.

A door, I tell you, so small that even she had to duck going in. Now I know as well as anyone what a room is like up here in the mountains—two yards of earth and rocks, a sack of maize leaves, a basin, a stove and in the corner, the goat; and if there's anything more it's a gift from heaven. I have seen them by the hundred, and over years, and in every single one, even in the dark, I would know where to find the matches and candles without stepping on the cat. There was no earthly reason why the old crone's room should differ from all the others. That's the way it is; in things of this kind I don't believe I'm stupider than anyone else; and I know that however you look at it, two yards is always two yards and not even the Holy Office could change that.

But when I saw her back disappearing into the shadow and then the door closed in my face, it literally seemed to me as if her lair had been whisked beyond the top of the mountains. And for all the absurdity of the door which hadn't a trace of a lock or a bolt, I could have taken my oath that I'd find it easier to knock down the main door of the Bishop's palace.

Sometimes you get ideas like that.

I took a glance around. The dead season was just beginning, with barren branches and sparrows killed by the cold; when night falls at six the ditches are frozen and the old folk queue up to die and Melide sews them into their winding-sheets and I take them up to the mountain graveyard and the children spend the whole season in the stables warming themselves by the breath of the mules. . . . A winter that lasts five or six months. What would happen to the old crone in that time?

I could feel the approach of winter in my bones. For a moment I glanced at the clouds which had now grown as big as a whale and then I set out for the presbytery. The clouds followed me, dogging my steps as though they knew something. Sometimes you get ideas like that.

But what on earth else could I do?

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By December up our way the paths are frozen hard and the sound of footsteps can be heard almost from the bottom of the valley.

I listened to them approaching for an hour or more, my head at the window that looks towards the mountains. The air was now beginning to turn the colour of dirty snow and the neighbouring houses were paler and colder than the rocks. There was no one about in the streets. A child with a ragged muffler round his neck was pressing his nose against the glass.

A piece of gravel struck the window. Only then did I stir.

"The six old women of Bobbio," the boy called to me from below, pouting. "I came with them over the bog. They'll be here in half an hour."

It was true. When I turned my eyes in the direction of the marshes I fancied I saw black shadows in the middle of the frosted path.

The boy came upstairs. He was far from being a prodigy, he couldn't recite poetry or anything of that sort, but in his own way he must have had some sense for, as he came into the room, he gave me the kind of look you give an incurable invalid. Thoroughly ill at ease, he was, and came forward on tiptoes.

We didn't exchange a word. Even the window panes were the colour of dirty snow. The child with the rag round his neck was still in the same position. A wisp of smoke was rising from a window.

"Am I to go and put on my cassock?" asked the boy in a low voice.

"Not yet," I said, "there's plenty of time."

He stayed a moment without speaking.

"Melide has already washed her and combed her hair," he said, with some reserve.

I looked down along the street towards the mountain marsh. Something black was approaching through the cutting cold and the whiteness.

"And now she'll have to sew the shroud," he went on, after a pause.

"There's still time," I answered faintly. "Anyway, we must wait for the old women to do the wake. Have they accepted three hundred and twenty?"

"Yes. Three hundred and twenty. And they have to eat something and spend the night here. They've walked five miles, they say."

"True enough."

The room was now swathed in shadows and the boy, two feet away, was no more than a darker shadow.

"Shall I go and get the light?" he asked me.

"It doesn't matter. Leave it," I said.

After which we fell silent for four or five minutes. Then I felt sorry for him. But above all I wanted to be alone.

"Good. Now I think it must be time," I said wearily. "Get the cotta, the holy water and the rest. And then go and dress."

The boy moved on tiptoe. But by the doorway he turned back.

"The six old women from Bobbio also hinted that they would like something hot. The paths are freezing, they say."

I nodded. It was as it should be. That too was as it should be. The boy went off.

For three months I had gone every evening to the ravine and every evening I had seen her there with her washing while her goat grazed in the vicinity. I used to halt there by the crest, always as if by chance and never for more than a minute; just enough time for her to notice and show that she had noticed. Then off again, back to the presbytery.

Never once in three months did she make the slightest sign or even raise her head. She was still there; that was all; and from the crest I could see she was there and nothing else mattered. Both of us were fully aware that we would never speak together again nor even greet one another if we met, but even that hadn't the slightest importance.

And now all was over. Something had happened one day and now all was over.

I felt no interior pain, though, or remorse or melancholy or anything of that sort. All I felt was a great emptiness within as though henceforward nothing further could happen to me. Nothing further till the end of time.

I wandered up and down the room where she had spoken with me so foolishly on the first occasion, I tidied a book and then tidied it again, or strummed on the window-pane with my fingers; and by now even a child could

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have led me by the hand. A ridiculous old crone; a ridiculous priest; a ridiculous two-penny-halfpenny story.

And now a noise came from the street below. So the six old women of Bobbio must be arriving. The hedges were frozen over. The six old women were stamping their feet with the cold. A wisp of smoke issued from a second house.

The boy came upstairs and knocked on the door.

"Your Reverence," he called, without entering, "I'm hurrying off to toll the bell. Melide has just finished this moment."

"I'm coming immediately," I said.

It was cold. December is cold round here.

AND here I am.

The old crone is dead. Melide is dead. Now the boy takes the goats up the mountain-side.

I have only seen the priest from Braino once since. He was hurrying downhill as I was climbing up the path by the pastures.

"Any news from Montelice?" he shouted from below, with a laugh.

I spread my arms wide open.

"Nothing happens; nothing whatsoever."

He had grown too fat for me to tell him the story. Still laughing, he hurried off. He had really and truly grown fat.

Up here there is a certain hour when the underbrush and the woods and the pasture-lands turn the colour of rust, and then violet and then blue; at the first fall of darkness the women get busy bending over their doorsteps and blowing their stoves, and the bronze cattle-bells are heard clearly down as far as the village. The goats gaze out of the doorways with eyes that seem just like ours.

At that hour of day I come to think more and more often that it is time for me to pack my bag and quietly make my way home. I think too that I've got my ticket ready.

For all this is rather monotonous, isn't it?

(*Translated from the Italian by Bernard Wall*)

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Herbert Luthy

Berlin: The Unhaunted City

OLD inhabitants of the city like to point out that Berlin has always been built on sand. And it is true that no other great European city seems to have been set down so arbitrarily in a terrain so unfavourable to the emergence of a world capital. Berlin is a political creation through and through; a "triumph of the will," as people used to say in a Germany that is gone for ever. Developed as an artificial cultural centre by the Prussian kings and electors who resided there, it grew up under the mixed influence of French Huguenots, Dutch Calvinists, and the first of the emancipated Jews; then, in the 19th century, and especially after the founding of the Reich, it swelled like a gigantic mushroom, absorbing an endless stream of settlers from Silesia and the territories even further east, and with them a strong Slavic tint. Very cosmopolitan and very "new German," very aware of itself and equally unsure of itself; flexible, industrious, and impudent in the highest degree; enormously receptive to everything novel, from the Wilhelminian style of architecture to the "cultural bolshevism" of the Weimar days to the Nazi literature of "blood and soil"—not a lovable city, perhaps, but one exceedingly wide awake.

Berlin's duality—a Janus-headed metropolis facing both west and east—has naturally been intensified by the present uneasy and absurd position in which it finds itself: cut in two, isolated deep inside Soviet territory, and suddenly transformed from a pile of smoking ruins to an "outpost of freedom." The Berliners were, perhaps, better prepared than any other people for this new role, and they have played it with consummate skill. In fact the naturalness, the vigour, and the self-confidence with which they stepped into their part in a new and extemporaneous act of the world political drama has been a great stroke of luck for a Europe in which just these qualities have, during the last years, been almost catastrophically absent.

The most insidious danger to such an effort is that it might only be sustainable under the glare of spotlights—amid applause or catcalls, but in any case as the centre of worldwide attention. The whole post-war situation in Berlin has been so dramatically oversharpened that one is always tempted to speak of it in exciting and warlike images—"the beleaguered fortress," "the clash of two worlds," etc. But the spotlight has now become dim and sporadic, and except for an occasional special event—the blockade and air-lift, a sudden upsurge in the number of refugees from the East, the rebellion of last June—the struggle for Berlin has been an uncomfortable but everyday business, in which the gratifying consciousness of standing in the front line for the whole free world has gradually been dissipated. The foreign correspondents have followed the Allied High Commissioners to Bonn; the feature writers have departed for new and more spectacular conflagrations; and the politics of Berlin, in the narrow sense, has become the local politics of a divided city-state in whose affairs the Great Powers keep a meddlesome finger.

The world held its breath during the blockade of Berlin, and during the later riots in the Eastern zone. But these dramatic incidents fade away in memory, and who can get excited over recurrent daily trifles?

BUT Berlin today represents not only an almost desperate attempt to remain a great city, a metropolis, a world capital in the teeth of all difficulties; it also has an idyllic, village

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quality that makes the strain endurable. Thanks to the very wilfulness with which it was set down in its rural landscape, Berlin enjoys surroundings almost unmatchable for an inland city; it lies in the midst of lakes, woods, and meadows that reach deep into the city from all sides and bring with them the air of the country. Because of this, West Berlin has enough space, oxygen, and scenery of its own to make its isolated life tolerable. Berliners can still troop in droves to the Wannsee on Sunday, on weekdays a poet or a pair of lovers can stroll for hours along the Schlachtensee without meeting another human being, and school children can go for long walks in the Grünewald without trespassing on the domain of the People's Police. The destruction of war has left Berlin with even more light, space, and openness than it had before, and has made it more receptive to nature.

One of the first and most wonderful impressions a visitor receives is that here a whole population seems to be busy with the planting of public gardens and the restoring of forests. The reason, or one of the reasons, for these activities is prosaic enough: the seeding of parks and the nursing of pansies or little fir trees is the kind of relief work that puts the least strain on Berlin's budget; it can be undertaken with spades and wheelbarrows, while even the removal of rubble or the repairing of streets would require all kinds of materials and machines. West Berlin has some quarter of a million unemployed, and there is no prospect of their being absorbed by Berlin's industries under present conditions, which are not exactly favourable to expansion. In addition, there is the monthly influx of refugees from the Eastern Zone, who must be sheltered, given work, and helped on their way. The work that is done, like the widening of the Clay Allee or the rebuilding of the great office buildings in the neighbourhood of the Kurfürstendamm, is undertaken more for purposes of beautification than out of real necessity. The condition of the streets is more than adequate for the greatly reduced traffic, and Berlin is one of the few cities of the world which hardly knows a housing problem: the number of inhabitants has shrunk more than the number of habitable dwellings.

What has happened is that the city has emigrated, so to speak, from its destroyed centre into the undamaged suburbs, which also shelter the occupation authorities, each of which leads its separate life in its own little village; the Americans in Zehlendorf, the British in Charlottenburg, and the French, wholly cut off, in the garden town of Frohnau, which is practically inaccessible except by the Russian-controlled S-Bahn that traverses the Soviet sector. In its isolation, the life of Berlin, economic as well as spiritual, has become too meagre to fill out the whole dimensions of this city, except in moments of great tension, and has withdrawn into little nuclei on the periphery that barely retain contact with one another. That this city without a centre has not dissolved into a ring of villages around an extinguished crater is due above all to the iron clasp that holds all its parts together.

THIS clasp embraces not only the "Western island" but both Berlins, East and West. And this indicates a third level of the manifold reality of Berlin, deeper than its division in two, deeper than its crumbling into idyllic villages: the city has remained a whole, and mocks the Iron Curtain. It lies subject to two enemy worlds with opposing laws and values, with opposing police forces, currencies, newspapers, posters, phrases, and slogans. Almost everything that is valid in one half is forbidden and punishable in the other; and yet it is *one* city, and has remained whole. The curtain that runs crookedly across the city hangs in tattered shreds.

It is possible, but also ridiculous, to prohibit newspapers which can be bought again two stations further on the U-Bahn. It is possible, but stupid, to describe to the inhabitants of East Berlin the progress of "socialism" and the growing poverty of their Western neighbours, when they can without difficulty exchange their currency for its Western equivalent at the Zoo, remark the rate of exchange, and then go shopping in the West. The mere existence of the enclave of West Berlin has forced the East German régime to separate East Berlin from the rest of the Soviet Zone as a source of infection, and to draw the Iron

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Curtain around the whole city; only at the border between greater Berlin and "the zone" do the controls, the sentry-posts, and the police-checks begin. But even here the barrier is penetrable; the German "Democratic Republic" cannot, after all, cut off its own official capital from the rest of the country. All the obstacles contrived by the Communists to make communication difficult are an inadequate substitute for that complete sealing-off which is necessary for a totalitarian régime. Two leaky filters together do not make a watertight gasket.

It is reasonably easy to get from Soviet Germany to East Berlin, and even easier to get from there to West Berlin. And so there is, if not a stream, at least an unbroken trickle of people in motion between Brandenburg, Saxony, Thuringia, and the "Western island"; many kinds of people with a variety of purposes, from the little black marketeer and the big illegal operator, at whom, in their own interest, the Soviet authorities often wink, to people who simply want to draw a breath of air, eat well, and enjoy an evening's entertainment again—for West Berlin with its pathetic little nightclubs, its "*Schönheitstänzerinnen*" and its hard-pressed war widows who patrol the Kurfürstendamm, has become the sole pleasure centre for all of Eastern Germany, including even Communist Party and government officials.

As long as West Berlin stands, the Soviet régime in Eastern Germany cannot consolidate itself; the Iron Curtain has been thrown back to the Oder-Neisse line. Berlin only looks isolated when seen from the West, to which it is linked by a precarious thread that runs through Soviet Germany and can be cut by the Russians at any time; and if the inhabitants of Berlin speak with profound enthusiasm of the West, to which they would like to belong, it is not the Bonn Republic they mean but the power which has held that line of communication open—America. But Berlin is also linked to the Soviet Zone, by a whole network of underground roots which the Russians have tried—and failed—to sever, after their unsuccessful attempt to bring the whole tree down in 1949. Berlin is not a part of the Bonn Republic, politically or even spiritually, although for financial reasons it would like to belong to it. It is the secret capital of Eastern Germany—and a truer capital than it ever was before.

Which of these three Berlins—the nerve centre of the cold war, the cluster of villages on the margin of world history, or the capital of a secret republic—is the real one? It is hard to say. Its inhabitants live in all three at once, and the visitor finds himself transported constantly and dizzyingly from one to the other.

WEST Berlin is economically a deficit undertaking, even more than Western Europe as a whole, and even less than the latter is it of any strategic military value. However, since the Americans love clearly-assigned functions, neat book-keeping headings, they have listed Berlin under "Advertising"—it is "the show window of the West behind the Iron Curtain." The slogan is popular, even in Berlin itself; few people mind being placed in a show window, and the city has benefited by the efforts made to display in it, for the benefit of the East, model social conditions, genuine democracy, and the Western way of life. Naturally, the Communists in East Berlin have long ago set up their competing show window —unlike West Berlin's, a "total" one. The June revolt smashed it to bits with one blow, but the Communists are energetically and painstakingly reconstructing it. So two show windows face each other; "way of life" against "way of life."

It begins, in the West, with the neon-lighted brilliance of the Kurfürstendamm, the great department stores, the old restaurants with their solid cuisine, the evening activity of the main streets and the pleasure spots—all those things which can neither be seen nor had east of the Potsdamer Platz. To be sure, all this is only rich and bustling in comparison with the grey, joyless streets of the Eastern sector, with their silent, tired pedestrians, always munching something and always hurrying somewhere; with the empty show windows of their government-run shops stuffed bleakly with *Zwieback* if a consignment of *Zwieback* has come through, or with margarine if that has

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been delivered, and hung with the same screaming placards and banners that have been plastered up on every wall, corner, and ruined building to proclaim, with the artistry of advertisements for cereals and cooking fats, Peace, Unity, and Progress. It is only cosmopolitan compared with the pitiful displays of those "retail shops" which have still managed to prolong their existence in East Berlin and are forced, in any case, to hang out the same political decorations—compared, in short, with a complete bleakness which is not lessened but heightened by the few new Party buildings and the marble-columned monstrosity of the new Soviet Embassy. As if Berlin were not already ruined and hateful enough for them, the Soviet German authorities have torn down what was almost the only Berlin monument of artistic value and European importance, the Schluter Castle, which was damaged in the war but could easily have been restored, and laid out in its place an enormous square to be used for marches and demonstrations. If West Berlin is a great city reduced to an almost village-like existence, which maintains the character of a great city only on the "Ku-Damm" and a few great business streets, East Berlin is a Potemkin village that has covered its emptiness with shrieking posters.

To say that the poster-covered walls of East Berlin are propaganda is a tautology: they are propaganda to an extent where they defeat themselves. But is the Kurfürstendamm propaganda? If it were, it would be bad propaganda. Too much poverty and prostitution, shadiness, cheap vulgarity, and empty pretence are in evidence there—and just behind the neon lights begin the pitch-black ruins of the bombed streets. That all this also has its power of attraction has already been said, but it is not an ideological attraction, only a human one; and it is not a brilliant idea to set it up as a show window inscribed, "See, this is the West." A democratic society cannot, like its totalitarian opponent, set its members in a show window, arranged in neat, well-ordered rows, to model its conception of the ideal polity.

One thing that, fortunately, is missing in Berlin is the swaggering ostentation of the newly rich which flaunts itself in the cities of Western Germany—the provocative proximity of luxury and misery in cities like Frankfurt or Düsseldorf often seems to be lifted straight out of the pages of the crudest of Communist propaganda leaflets. In Berlin, too, the light and the darkness lie near each other, but the contrast is not so shrill, for the "Ku-Damm" is the little Broadway of a poor and hard-pressed city, and pretends to be nothing else; even what would like to be luxury is sober and sparing here. Ostentation and poverty are both subdued by a genuine consciousness of solidarity, of the kind that develops in a "beleaguered fortress"—a sense of communal duty, or simply of communal shame under the eyes of the Communist critics on the other side of the Potsdamer Platz.

This is the whole extent to which the sense of living in a show window has an effect; and it is a beneficial effect because it expresses itself in a human attitude, and not in words, gestures, or banners. For all those who come over from the other side, whether as visitors or fugitives, it is just this liberating sense of having escaped the realm of all-powerful propaganda, of slogans, flags, and banners, that makes Berlin seem like a foretaste of Paradise; that people here can go to work, to the movies, to a honky-tonk or even just for a walk without thereby automatically "falling in" for an ideological demonstration is just as staggering as that here, a stone's throw from the reach of the new Gestapo, people are free to criticise Adenauer as bitterly as Grotewohl, or Malenkov as bitterly as Eisenhower, and often do. To attempt to put freedom in a show window is an enterprise full of self-contradiction; in West Berlin it has succeeded —thanks to the unique circumstance that in this city, surrounded by compulsion, propaganda, and forced unanimity, the very absence of these things has become palpable and visible, as the human breath only becomes visible in a deep frost.

This is what counts, and it lies beyond all propaganda. Propaganda has become the great straw giant of our times—at a moment when the total ineffectiveness of propaganda that is not an emanation of organised power is plainly visible all around us. It is both moving and disturbing to see, in Berlin, handbills and

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pamphlets intended for the Soviet zone, printed by anti-Communists at the risk of their own and other lives, which contain nothing but pointless jokes about Pieck and Malenkov or commonplaces about the evils of the Communist régime—as if the inhabitants of the Eastern zone were not a thousand times more instructed in these things than anyone in the West. There are other, more meaningful, specimens of propaganda literature which come to grips with the Soviet régime in a serious way, and which can contribute a great deal to the spiritual resistance of those on the other side of the curtain; but a great deal of the literature, and especially that written and printed for the purpose of illegal distribution by the actual "resistance officials" themselves, is almost criminally stupid. Still, perhaps the difference in effectiveness is not so large; even the silliest sticker or comic-strip that bobs up on the other side of the Iron Curtain is effective precisely in so far as it strikes the observer as being the manifestation of an organised power. It is not the fault of the stickers if the West seldom succeeds in backing up this impression. . . .

ONE hesitates a little to join in the chorus of praise for Berlin. The Berliners themselves sing it so well—in that, at least, they have not changed. The heroism of Berlin, Berlin's will to freedom, the exemplary qualities of the Berliners—they are written about in the newspapers, and every West German or Allied statesman who comes to Berlin for a conference, a meeting, or an exhibition adds his voice to the chorus as if he were fulfilling a ritual obligation. Since all this takes place in an admitted "show window," it becomes a little suspect, as even the genuine becomes suspect when it is placed in a show window. And yet—for someone who would like to cure himself of Western Europe's chronic hangover, its listlessness and pettiness, there is nothing better than a stay in Berlin.

And no better advice could be given those who have fled from the Russian sphere, bringing with them all the ideal conceptions a man in prison creates about the world outside, than to remain in West Berlin—if West Berlin could lodge them, feed them, and give them work. For it is when the fugitive succeeds in moving to the reception camps of Western Germany, and finally, with a great deal of luck and patience, back into civil life, that his enthusiasm turns to disgust. Is this the free world—this commercial humdrumness, this powerlessness, this ignorance, this defeatism? For let us not delude ourselves: to someone coming from the tense, driving Stakhanovist atmosphere of Soviet Europe, with its cult of achievement, this is the way Western Europe and, above all, Western Germany, look. And that is the way they look to the Berliners too. The odd mixture of political contempt and shoulder-shrugging incomprehension with which the Bonn Republic is spoken of in Berlin is one of the first characteristics to strike the visitor.

The main and simplest reason for the wholly different climate that reigns in this city is this: Berlin is not part of "the West." Berlin lies deep inside that half of Europe which we call, with unspeakable mental laziness, "Eastern Europe," although it actually begins a hundred kilometres from Frankfurt-on-the-Main. Berlin lies in this "East," not only territorially but spiritually. In Western Germany, this amputated Soviet Germany is the subject of official speeches and an attractive theme for demagoguery; but an inner sense of solidarity with the "brethren in the East" is hard to detect. But, in Berlin, the thought of settling down in that reduced rump of "Western" Europe becomes too silly even to be framed. The existence of this enclave can be meaningful at all only as a springboard, a "conspiratorial centre," a position for the "counter-offensive."

This word "offensive," which is whispered, vaguely and ambiguously, in the West too, has a very definite meaning in Berlin—and not a military one. What Western Europe hardly dares to believe any more is obvious here: that the concept of freedom still has its old explosive power, if only one knows what one means by it, and that the people who know that most are precisely those who have lost it. It means not so much voting and parliamentary machinery but those primary, uncomplicated things from which all democratic processes are

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derived, and for whose safeguarding they exist: a minimum of private existence uncontrolled and uncoordinated by the state; and even those poor, unpresentable things like the right to change jobs or to be unemployed without being deported—for unemployment is statistically non-existent in the Eastern Zone only because it is synonymous with illegality.

It is true that in Eastern Germany there is almost no tradition of freedom comparable to the traditions of some of the peoples of Western Europe. But those traditions often seem to have grown old and tired, while here the experience is fresh. The people of Berlin have won a very personal relationship to this freedom not only because they live on its furthest frontier but because they have fought for it—while in Western Germany freedom was imposed, so to speak, by compulsion. For it is obviously true that men only treasure and defend what they have obtained at a risk. The experience of the blockade cleared the air of Berlin like a thunderstorm. Courage is as infectious as fear, and between the two there is often only an eyelash. In that decisive moment, the spirit of resistance was made flesh in West Berlin, incarnated in the daily life of every citizen, and especially in Berlin's lost and lamented leader, Ernst Reuter. For the first time in German history, the idea of freedom became the personal property of the citizen. Without the airlift Berlin could not have held out long, but there would have been no airlift at all if the citizens of Berlin had capitulated. Only the action of a whole population, which staked everything it had on the outcome, first created the situation in which it became morally impossible for the Western powers to leave Berlin in the lurch.

With this experience, a new chapter in the history of Berlin began, a chapter that is remembered now as the victorious "Battle for Freedom." One should not shrug one's shoulders at the naïveté of such a foundation legend; for without it no society and no public consciousness can come to birth. Thanks to it, Berlin is the only German city in which the Third Reich is really over and done with, and the ghosts of the past no longer haunt the living. Since the end of the war and the collapse of the illusions of victory, neither Western Europe nor Western Germany has experienced a storm that might have cleared the air, and so they have been left in their stale worlds of having-had and having-been. Berlin gives the uncommonly refreshing sensation of living in the present—and of not being afraid of it.

THERE is hardly another city in Europe where "the next war" is so little talked of, or the idea suggested that it might be wise, after all, to think of saving one's own skin. Berlin lies far beyond any conceivable line of defence; it is impossible here to substitute strategic speculations for political thought, as the fashion is elsewhere. The whole existence of Berlin rests on the assumption that the forces of the two world powers hold each other stalemated, and that within this equilibrium there remains room enough, narrow as it is, to give play for political debate. And in this debate Berlin's role is the imponderable one of being the secret capital of Eastern Germany, the capital of the East German resistance.

It is only from those who today are holding out spiritually in Eastern Germany that the political regeneration of Germany can come. And the existence of Berlin has left these people a hole in the prison wall, through which light and air can reach them. The revolt of June 17th showed how significant this can be. Almost all the traditional methods of resistance, even the classic methods of illegality, are quite simply inapplicable to the totalitarian reality. And yet, when the East German régime had to seek refuge behind the armour of Soviet tanks, it dispossessed itself of the most powerful attribute of totalitarianism: the façade of unanimity and the very unthinkableness of open protest. It revealed itself as a plain, naked, old-fashioned tyranny. The power of the Communist machine over the human spirit springs from the consciousness, which even its internal opponents find hard to shake off, of forming part of a great, conquering, historical process which can be slowed down or even stopped sometimes, but never reversed. It is precisely in Eastern Germany—especially since the "June days"—that this myth of final

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victory has proved itself most fragile, and in Berlin, which lies behind the façade, the breaks in it are clearly visible. The tables can be turned if we succeed in reversing the psychological current of fear. This is a slow and difficult process which can take place only by molecular displacement, and Berlin is merely one of its laboratories, although one in a crucial position.

If the internal opposition and even the hate of its subjects count for little, in a totalitarian régime, against the apparatus of the state, that apparatus has its own internal enemies and its "insurance seekers" too. The thousands of deserters from the Volkspolizei demonstrate this vulnerability. Threads run from the silently, but very effectively, active Ostbüro of the Social Democratic party to every corner of the East German ruling party and government apparatus. In its own special province, the "Committee of Free Jurists" has brought this technique of shifting the weight of fear on to Communist shoulders to perfection. All its effectiveness is based on the fact that many officials in the police and judicial arms of the East German government not only inwardly oppose the daily perversion of justice, but are afraid that some day they will be brought to account for the terror whose instruments they are—or that they can be taught this fear if the consciousness that their actions are not anonymous and will not go unpunished can be brought home to them. Here, painstakingly kept files become a weapon: the "Free Jurists" keep a record of the reports of arbitrary arrest, judicial terror, expropriation, and deportation that reach them from all over Eastern Germany; they receive and advise the victims of the Eastern Zone's justice, as well as officials of that justice who are seeking a compromise between conscience—or foresight—and the compulsion of the ruling Party. In the three years of its existence, literally tens of thousands of visitors from the Eastern zone have passed through the discreet building on the Schlachtensee where its headquarters are located—a total whose full meaning becomes clear when one considers that, with this step, every one of these visitors committed what is, in Communist eyes, high treason.

In Berlin, the current of fear has been reversed. Till now this has remained a local victory and, as such, provisional and precarious. But sinister as the situation of this city may look on a map—there are few places in Europe that are so free of spectres.

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Edmund Blunden

Eight Japanese Poems

IT IS common knowledge that Japanese poems are traditionally limited to forms of a few syllables only—often seventeen, sometimes thirty-one syllables; and these serve as meeting-places for the immediate and the timeless. Metrically Japanese poems are perhaps to be described as cadences, and when they are heard as good readers repeat them, their union of sweetness and sadness is deeply felt. They have a kind of humour, and are epigrammatic, but the word "brilliant" would not fit them. To write them is still the passion of all ranks in Japan, and large groups, even of workmen, practise the art and on occasion go on day-trips to pleasant places for it.

The number of excellent *haiku* from the past is vast. Some idea of this is given in Mr. R. H. Alyth's recent volumes (*Haiku*) published in Tokyo by Hokuseido. My own examples are a few taken almost at random, as they especially caught me, but I took them because they seemed to require no annotation in being transferred to new readers. They are of the 17th and 18th centuries, but such poems are almost of no period. Life in Japan still proves them new and inevitable, both as pictures and as interpretations of human life.—E. B.

The labourer hoes on.
The cloud above which did not move
Is gone.
(*Buson*)

The tide goes out;
With doubt
The crab
Comes to a footprint in the sand.
(*Rofu*)

On the temple's great bell
A butterfly
Is sleeping well.
(*Buson*)

Now the snows have gone
Our little town
With children overflows!
(*Issa*)

There's the first cartload of the year,
The bony horse
Has rosettes to wear.
(*Shiki*)

The camellia-flower dropped,
The rain-drop it held
So fell.
(*Basho*)

I see
The willow-tree,
And awaiting the ferry
Cows two or three.
(*Shiki*)

I have sold my cow.
She leaves the village
In the evening dusk now.
(*Hyakuchi*)

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Mary McCarthy

My Confession

EVERY age has a keyhole to which its eye is pasted. Spicy court-memoirs, the lives of gallant ladies, recollections of an ex-nun, a monk's confession, an atheist's repentance, true-to-life accounts of prostitution and bastardy gave our ancestors a penny peep into the forbidden room. In our own day, this type of sensational fact-fiction is being produced largely by ex-Communists. Public curiosity shows an almost prurient avidity for the details of political defloration, and the memoirs of ex-Communists have an odd resemblance to the confessions of a white slave. Two shuddering climaxes, two rendezvous with destiny, form the poles between which these narratives vibrate: the first describes the occasion when the subject was seduced by Communism; the second shows him wresting himself from the demon embrace. Variations on the form are possible. Senator McCarthy, for example, in his book, *McCarthyism, the Fight for America*, uses a tense series of flashbacks to dramatise his encounter with Communism: the country lies passive in Communism's clasp; he is given a tryst with destiny in the lonely Arizona hills, where, surrounded by "real Americans without any synthetic sheen," he attains the decision that will send him down the long marble corridors to the Senate Caucus Room to bare the shameful commerce.

The diapason of choice plays, like movie music, round today's apostle to the Gentiles: Whittaker Chambers on a bench and, in a reprise, awake all night at a dark window, facing the void. These people, unlike ordinary beings, are shown the true course during a lightning storm of revelation, on the road to Damascus. And their decisions are lonely decisions, silhouetted against a background of public incomprehension and hostility.

I object. I have read the reminiscences of Mr. Chambers and Miss Bentley. I too have had a share in the political movements of our day, and my experience cries out against their experience. It is not the facts I balk at—I have never been an espionage agent—but the studio atmosphere of sublimity and purpose that enfolds the facts and the chief actor. When Whittaker Chambers is mounted on his tractor, or Elizabeth Bentley, alone, is meditating her decision in a white New England church, I have the sense that they are on location and that, at any moment, the director will call "Cut." It has never been like that for me; events have never waited, like extras, while I toiled to make up my mind between good and evil. In fact, I have never known these mental convulsions, which appear quite strange to me when I read about them, even when I do not question the author's sincerity.

Is it really so difficult to tell a good action from a bad one? I think one usually knows right away or a moment afterwards, in a horrid flash of regret. And when one genuinely hesitates—or at least it is so in my case—it is never about anything of importance, but about perplexing trivial things, such as whether to have fish or meat for dinner, or whether to take the bus or subway to reach a certain destination, or whether to wear the beige or the green. The "great" decisions—those I can look back on pensively and say, "That was a turning-point"—have been made without my awareness. Too late to do anything about it, I discover that I have chosen. And this is particularly striking when the choice has been political or historic. For me, in fact, the mark of the historic is the nonchalance with which it picks up an individual and deposits him in a trend, like a house playfully moved by a tornado.

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My own experience with Communism prompts me to relate it, just because it had this inadvertence that seems to me lacking in the true confessions of reformed Communists. Like Stendhal's hero, who took part in something confused and disarrayed and insignificant that he later learned was the Battle of Waterloo, I joined the anti-Communist movement without meaning to and only found out afterwards, through others, the meaning or "name" assigned to what I had done. This occurred in the late fall of 1936.

THREE years before, I had graduated from college—Vassar, the same college Elizabeth Bentley had gone to—without having suffered any fracture of my political beliefs or moral frame. All through college, my official political philosophy was royalism; though I was not much interested in politics, it irritated me to be told that "you could not turn the clock back." But I did not see much prospect for kingship in the United States (unless you imported one, like the Swedes), and, *faute de mieux*, I awarded my sympathies to the Democratic Party, which I tried to look on as the party of the Southern patriciate. At the same time, I had an aversion to Republicans—an instinctive feeling that had been with me since I was a child of eight pedalling my wagon up and down our cement driveway and howling, "Hurray for Cox," at the Republican neighbours who passed by. I disliked business men and business attitudes partly, I think, because I came from a professional (though Republican) family and had picked up a disdain for business men as being beneath us, in education and general culture. And the anti-Catholic prejudice against Al Smith during the 1928 election, the tinkling amusement at Mrs. Smith's vulgarity, democratised me a little in spite of myself: I was won by Smith's plebeian charm, the big coarse nose, and rubbery politician's smile.

But this same distrust of uniformity made me shrink, in 1932, from the sloppily dressed socialist girls at college who paraded for Norman Thomas and tirelessly argued over "cokes"; their eager fellowship and scrawled placards and heavy personalities bored me—there was something, to my mind, deeply athletic about this socialism. It was a kind of political hockey played by big, gaunt, dyspeptic girls in pants. It startled me a little, therefore, to learn that in an election poll taken of the faculty, several of my favourite teachers had voted for Thomas; in them, the socialist faith appeared rather charming, I decided—a gracious and attractive oddity, like the English Ovals they gave you when you came for tea. That was the winter Hitler was coming to power and, hearing of the anti-Jewish atrocities, I had a flurry of political indignation. I wrote a prose-poem that dealt, in a mixed-up way, with the Polish Corridor and the Jews. This poem was so unlike me that I did not know whether to be proud of it or ashamed of it when I saw it in a college magazine. At this period, we were interested in surrealism and automatic writing, and the poem had a certain renown because it had come out of my interior without much sense or order, just the way automatic writing was supposed to do. But there my political development stopped.

The depression was closer to home; in New York I used to see apple-sellers on the street corners, and, now and then, a bread-line, but I had a very thin awareness of mass poverty. The depression was too close to home to awaken anything but curiosity and wonder—the feelings of a child confronted with a death in the family. I was conscious of the suicides of stockbrokers and business men, and of the fact that some of my friends had to go on scholarships and had their dress allowances curtailed, while their mothers gaily turned to doing their own cooking. To most of us at Vassar, I think, the depression was chiefly an upper-class phenomenon.

My real interests were literary. In a paper for my English Renaissance seminar, I noted a resemblance between the Elizabethan puritan pundits and the school of Marxist criticism that was beginning to pontificate about proletarian literature in the *New Masses*. I disliked the modern fanatics, cold, envious little clerics, equally with the insufferable and ridiculous Gabriel Harvey—Cambridge pedant and friend of Spenser—who tried to introduce the rules of Latin quantity into English verse and vilified a

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true poet who had died young, in squalor and misery. I really hated absolutism and officiousness of any kind (I preferred my kings martyred) and was pleased to be able to recognise a Zeal-of-the-Land-Busy in proletarian dress. And it was through a novel that I first learned, in my senior year, about the Sacco-Vanzetti case. The discovery that two innocent men had been executed only a few years back while I, oblivious, was in boarding school, gave me a disturbing shock. The case was still so near that I was tantalised by a feeling that it was not too late to do something—try still another avenue, if Governor Fuller and the Supreme Court obdurately would not be moved. An unrectified case of injustice has a terrible way of lingering, restlessly, in the social atmosphere like an unfinished equation. I went on to the Mooney case, which vexed not only my sense of equity but my sense of plausibility—how was it possible for the prosecution to lie so, in broad daylight, with the whole world watching?

When in May, 1933, however, before graduation, I went down to apply for a job at the old *New Republic* offices, I was not drawn there by the magazine's editorial policy—I hardly knew what it was—but because the book-review section seemed to me to possess a certain elegance and independence of thought that would be hospitable to a critical spirit like me. And I was badly taken aback when the book-review editor, to whom I had been shunted—there was no job—puffed his pipe and remarked that he would give me a review if I could show him that I was either a genius or starving. "I'm not starving," I said quickly; I knew I was not a genius and I was not pleased by the suggestion that I would be taking bread from other people's mouths. I did not think this a fair criterion and in a moment I said so. In reply, he put down his pipe, shrugged, reached out for the material I had brought with me, and half-promised, after an assaying glance, to send me a book. My notice finally appeared; it was not very good, but I did not know that and was elated. Soon I was reviewing novels and biographies for both the *New Republic* and the *Nation* and preening myself on the connection. Yet, whenever I entered the *New Republic*'s waiting-room, I was seized with a feeling of nervous guilt towards the shirt-sleeved editors upstairs and their busy social conscience, and, above all, towards the shabby young men who were waiting too and who had, my bones told me, a better claim than I to the book I hoped to take away with me. They looked poor, pinched, scholarly, and supercilious, and I did not know which of these qualities made me, with my clicking high heels and fall "ensemble," seem more out of place.

I CANNOT remember the moment when I ceased to air my old royalist convictions and stuffed them away in an inner closet as you do a dress or an ornament that you perceive strikes the wrong note. It was probably at the time when I first became aware of Communists as a distinct entity. I had known about them, certainly, in college, but it was not until I came to New York that I began to have certain people, celebrities, pointed out to me as Communists and to turn my head to look at them, wonderingly. I had no wish to be one of them, but the fact that they were there—an unreckoned factor—made my own political opinions take on a protective coloration. This process was accelerated by my marriage—a week after graduation—to an actor and playwright who was in some ways very much like me. He was the son of a Minnesota normal school administrator who had been the scapegoat in an academic scandal that had turned him out of his job and reduced him, for a time, when my husband was nine or ten, to selling artificial limbs and encyclopædia sets from door to door. My husband still brooded over his father's misfortune, like Hamlet or a character in Ibsen, and this had given his nature a sardonic twist that inclined him to behave like a paradox—to follow the mode and despise it, live in a Beekman Place apartment while lacking the money to buy groceries, play bridge with society couples and poker with the stage electricians, dress in the English style and carry a walking-stick while wearing a red necktie.

He was an odd-looking man, prematurely bald, with a tense, arresting figure, a broken nose, a Standard English accent, and wry, circumflexed eyebrows. There was something about him both baleful and quizzical; whenever

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he stepped on to the stage he had the ironic air of a symbol. This curious appearance of his disqualified him for most Broadway roles; he was too young for character parts and too bald for juveniles. Yet just this disturbing ambiguity —a Communist painter friend did a drawing of him that brought out a resemblance to Lenin— suited the portentous and equivocal atmosphere of left-wing drama. He smiled dryly at Marxist terminology, but there was social anger in him. During the years we were married, the only work he found was in productions of "social" significance. He played for the Theatre Union in *The Sailors of Cattaro*, about a mutiny in the Austrian fleet, and in *Black Pit*, about coal-miners; the following year, he was in *Winterset* and Archibald MacLeish's *Panic*—the part of a blind man in both cases. He wrote revue sketches and unproduced plays, in a mocking, despairing, but none the less radical vein; he directed the book of a musical called *Americana* that featured the song, "Brother, Can You Spare a Dime?" I suppose there was something in him of both the victim and the leader, an undertone of totalitarianism; he was very much interested in the mythic qualities of leadership and talked briskly about a Farmer-Labour party in his stage English accent. Notions of the superman and the genius flickered across his thoughts. But this led him, as it happened, away from politics, into sheer personal vitalism, and it was only in plays that he entered "at the head of a mob." In personal life he was very winning, but that is beside the point here.

The point is that we both, through our professional connections, began to take part in a left-wing life, to which we felt superior, which we laughed at, but which nevertheless was influencing us without our being aware of it. If the composition of the body changes every seven years, the composition of our minds during the seven years of our engagement and marriage had slowly changed, so that though our thoughts looked the same to us, inside we had been altered, like an old car which has had part after part replaced in it under the hood.

We wore our rue with a difference; we should never have considered joining the Communist Party. We were not even fellow-travellers; we did not sign petitions or join "front" groups. We were not fools, after all, and were no more deceived by the League against War and Fascism, say, than by a China-town bus with a carload of shills aboard. It was part of our metropolitan sophistication to know the truth about Communist fronts. We accepted the need for social reform, but we declined to draw the "logical" inference that the Communists wanted us to draw from this. We argued with the comrades backstage in the dressing-rooms and at literary cocktail parties; I was attacked by a writer in the *New Masses*. We knew about Lovestoneites and Trotskyites, even while we were ignorant of the labour theory of value, the law of uneven development, the theory of permanent revolution *v.* socialism in one country, and so on. "Lovestone is a Lovestoneite!" John wrote in wax on his dressing-room mirror, and on his door in the old Civic Repertory he put up a sign: "Through these portals pass some of the most beautiful tractors in the Ukraine."

The comrades shrugged and laughed, a little unwillingly. They knew we were not hostile but merely unserious, politically. The comrades who knew us best used to assure us that our sophistication was just an armour; underneath, we must care for the same things they did. They were mistaken, I am afraid. Speaking for myself, I cannot remember a single broad altruistic emotion visiting me during that period—the kind of emotion the simpler comrades, with their shining eyes and exalted faces, seemed to have in copious secretion. And yet it was true: we were not hostile. We marched in May Day parades, just for the fun of it, and sang, "Hold the Fort, for We are Coming," and "*Bandiera Rossa*," and "The Internationale," though we always bellowed "The *Socialist* International shall be the human race," instead of "The International Soviet," to pique the Communists in our squad. We took part in evening clothes in a consumers' walkout at the Waldorf to support a waiters' strike; the Communists had nothing to do with this and we grew very excited (we did have negative feelings) when another young literary independent was arrested and booked. During a strike at a department store, John joined the

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sympathetic picketing and saw two of his fellow-actors carried off in the Black Maria; they missed a matinee and set off a controversy about what was the *first* responsibility of a Communist playing in a proletarian drama. We went once or twice to a class for actors in Marxism, just to see what was up; we went to a debate on Freud and/or Marx, to a debate on the execution of the hundred and four White Guards following Kirov's assassination.

Most ex-Communists nowadays, when they write their autobiographies or testify before congressional committees, are at pains to point out that their actions were very, very bad and their motives very, very good. I would say the reverse of myself, though without the intensives. I see no reason to disavow my actions, which were perfectly all right, but my motives give me a little embarrassment, and just because I cannot disavow them: that fevered, contentious, trivial show-off in the May Day parade is still recognisably me.

We went to dances at Webster Hall and took our uptown friends. We went to parties to raise money for the sharecroppers, for the Theatre Union, for the *New Masses*. These parties generally took place in a borrowed apartment, often a sculptor's or commercial artist's studio; you paid for your drinks, which were dispensed at a long, wet table; the liquor was dreadful; the glasses were small, and there was never enough ice. Long-haired men in turtle-necked sweaters marched into the room in processions and threw their overcoats on the floor, against the wall, and sat on them; they were only artists and bit-actors, but they gave these affairs a look of gangsterish menace, as if the room were guarded by the goons of the future. On couches with wrinkled slipcovers, little spiky-haired girls, like spiders, dressed in peasant blouses and carapaced with Mexican jewellery, made voracious passes at baby-faced juveniles; it was said that they "did it for the Party," as a recruiting effort. Vague, soft-faced old women with dust mops of whitish hair wandered benevolently about seeking a listener; on a sofa against a wall, like a deity, sat a bearded scion of an old Boston family, stiff as a post. All of us, generally, became very drunk; the atmosphere was horribly sordid, with cigarette burns on tables, spilled drinks, ashes everywhere, people passed out on the bed with the coats or necking, you could not be sure which. Nobody cared what happened because there was no host or hostess. The fact that a moneyed person had been simple enough to lend the apartment seemed to make the guests want to desecrate it, to show that they were exercising not a privilege but a right.

Obviously, I must have hated these parties, but I went to them, partly because I was ashamed of my own squeamishness, and partly because I had a curiosity about the Communist men I used to see there, not the actors or writers, but the higher-ups, impresarios and theoreticians—dark, smooth-haired owls with large white lugubrious faces and glasses. These were the spiritual directors of the Communist cultural celebrities and they moved about at these parties like so many monks or abbés in a worldly salon. I had always liked to argue with the clergy, and I used to argue with these men, who always had the air, as they stood with folded arms, of listening not to a disagreement but to a confession. Whenever I became tight, I would bring up (oh, *vino veritas*) the Tsar and his family. I did not see why they all had had to be killed—the Tsar himself, yes, perhaps, and the Tsarina, but not the young girls and the children. I knew the answer, of course (the young Tsarevitch or one of his sisters might have served as a rallying point for the counter-revolutionary forces), but still I gazed hopefully into these docents' faces, seeking a trace of scruple or compassion. But I saw only a marmoreal astuteness. The question was of bourgeois origin, they said with finality.

The next morning I was always bitterly ashamed. I had let these omniscient men see the real me underneath, and the other me squirmed and gritted her teeth and muttered, Never, never, *never* again. And yet they had not convinced me—there was the paradox. The superiority I felt to the Communists I knew had, for me at any rate, good grounding; it was based on their lack of humour, their fanaticism, and the slow drip of cant that thickened their utterance like a nasal catarrh. *And yet* I was tremendously impressed by them.

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They made me feel petty and shallow; they had, shall I say, a daily ugliness in their life that made my pretty life tawdry. I think all of us who moved in that ambience must have felt something of the kind, even while we laughed at them. When John and I, for instance, would say of a certain actor, "He is a Party member," our voices always contained a note of respect. This respect might be mixed with pity, as when we saw some blue-eyed young profile, fresh from his fraternity and his C average, join up because a sleazy girl had persuaded him. The literary Communists I sincerely despised because I was able to judge the quality of the work they published and see their dishonesty and contradictions; even so, when I beheld them in person, at a Webster Hall dance, I was troubled and felt perhaps I had wronged them —perhaps there was something in them that my vision could not perceive, as some eyes cannot perceive colour.

PEOPLE sometimes say that they envied the Communists because they were so "sure." In my case, this was not exactly it; I was sure, too, intellectually speaking, as far as I went. That is, I had a clear mind and was reasonably honest, while many of the Communists I knew were pathetically fogged up. In any case, my soul was not particularly hot for certainties.

And yet in another way I did envy the Communists, or, to be more accurate, wonder whether I ought to envy them. I could not, I saw, be a Communist because I was not "made that way." Hence, to be a Communist was to possess a sort of privilege. And this privilege, like all privileges, appeared to be a source of power. Any form of idiocy or aberration can confer this distinction on its owner, at least in our age, which aspires to a "total" experience; in the thirties it was the Communists who seemed fearsomely to be the happy few, not because they had peace or certitude but because they were a mutation—a mutation that threatened, in the words of their own anthem, to become the human race.

There was something arcane in every Communist, and the larger this area was the more we respected him. That was why the literary Communists, who operated in the open, doing the hatchet work on artists' reputations, were held in such relatively low esteem. An underground worker rated highest with us; next were the theoreticians and oracles; next were the activists, who mostly worked, we heard, on the waterfront. Last came the rank and file, whose work consisted of making speeches, distributing leaflets, attending party and fraction meetings, joining front organisations, marching in parades and demonstrations. These people we dismissed as uninteresting not so much because their work was routine but because the greater part of it was visible. In the same way, among individual comrades, we looked up to those who were close-lipped and stern about their beliefs and we disparaged the more voluble members—the forensic little actors who tried to harangue us in the dressing-rooms. The idea of a double life was what impressed us: the more talkative comrades seemed to have only one life, like us; but even they, we had to remind ourselves, had a secret annex to their personality, which was signified by their Party name. It is hard not to respect somebody who has an alias.

Of fellow-travellers, we had a very low opinion. People who were not willing to "go the whole way" filled us with impatient disdain. The only fellow-travellers who merited our notice were those of whom it was said: The Party prefers that they remain on the outside. I think some fellow-travellers circulated such stories about themselves deliberately, in order to appear more interesting. There was another type of fellow-traveller who let it be known that they stayed out of the Party because of some tiny doctrinal difference with Marxism. This tiny difference magnified them enormously in their own eyes and allowed them to bear gladly the accusation of cowardice. I knew one such person very well—a spruce, ingratiating swain, the heir to a large fortune—and I think it was not cowardice but a kind of pietistic vanity. He felt he cut more of a figure if he seemed to be doing the Party's dirty work gratuitously, without compulsion, like an oblate.

In making these distinctions (which were the very distinctions the Party made), I had no idea, of course, that I was allowing myself to be

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influenced by the Party in the field where I was most open to suasion—the field of social snobbery. Yet in fact I was being deterred from forming any political opinions of my own, lest I find I was that despised article, a "mere" socialist or watery liberal, in the same way that a young snob coming to college and seeing who the "right" people are will strive to make no friends rather than be caught with the wrong ones.

For me, the Communist Party was *the* party, and even though I did not join it, I prided myself on knowing that it was the pinnacle. It is only now that I see the social component in my attitude. At the time, I simply supposed that I was being clear-sighted and logical. I used to do research and typing for a disgruntled middle-aged man who was a freak for that day—an anti-Communist Marxist—and I was bewildered by his anti-Party bias. While we were drinking hot tea, Russian style, from glasses during the intervals of our work, I would try to show him his mistake. "Don't you think it's rather futile," I expostulated, "to criticise the Party the way you do, from the outside? After all, it's the *only* working-class Party, and if *I* were a Marxist I would join it and try to reform it." Snorting, he would raise his small deep-set blue eyes and stare at me and then try patiently to show me that there was no democracy in the Party. I listened disbelievingly. It seemed to me that it would just be a question of converting first one comrade and then another to your point of view till gradually you had achieved a majority. And when my employer assured me that they would throw you out if you tried that, my twenty-three-year-old wisdom cocked an eyebrow. I thought I knew what was the trouble: he was a pathologically lazy man and his growling criticisms of the Party were simply a form of malingering, like the aches and pains he used to manufacture to avoid working on an article. A real revolutionary who was not afraid of exertion would get into the Party and fight.

THE curious idea that being critical of the Party was a compelling reason for joining it must have been in the air, for the same argument was brought to bear on me in the summer of 1936—the summer my husband and I separated and that I came closest to the gravitational pull of the Communist world. Just before I went off to Reno, there was a week in June when I stayed in Southampton with the young man I was planning to marry and a little Communist organiser in an old summer house furnished with rattan and wicker and Chinese matting and mother-of-pearl and paper fans. We had come there for a purpose. The little organiser had just been assigned a car—a battered old Ford roadster that had been turned over to the Party for the use of some poor organiser; it may have been the very car that figured in the Hiss case. My fiancé, who had known him for years, perhaps from the peace movement, was going to teach him to drive. We were all at a pause in our lives. The following week our friend was supposed to take the car to California and do propaganda work among the migrant fruit-pickers; I was to go to Reno; my fiancé, a vivacious young bachelor, was to conquer his habits of idleness and buckle down to a serious job. Those seven days, therefore, had a special, still quality, like the days of a novena you make in your childhood; a part of each of them was set aside for the Party's task. It was early in June; the musty house that belonged to my fiancé's parents still had the winter-smell of mice and old wood and rust and mildew. The summer colony had not yet arrived; the red flag, meaning that it was dangerous to swim, flew daily on the beach; the roads were nearly empty. Every afternoon we would take the old car, canvas flapping, to a deserted stretch of straight road in the dunes, where the neophyte could take the wheel.

He was a large-browed, dwarfish man in his late thirties, with a deep widow's peak, a bristly short moustache, and a furry western accent—rather simple, open-natured, and cheerful, the sort of person who might have been a small-town salesman or itinerant newspaperman. There was an energetic, hopeful innocence about him that was not confined to his political convictions—he could *not* learn to drive. Every day the same thing happened; he would settle his frail yet stocky figure trustingly in the driver's seat, grip the wheel,

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step on the starter, and lose control of the car, which would shoot ahead in first or backward in reverse for a few perilous feet till my fiancé turned off the ignition; Ansel always mistook the gas for the brake and forgot to steer while he was shifting gears.

It was clear that he would never be able to pass the driver's test at the county seat. In the evenings, to make up to him for his oncoming disappointment (we smiled when he said he could start without a licence), we encouraged him to talk about the Party and tried to take an intelligent interest. We would sit by the lamp and drink and ask questions, while he smoked his short pipe and from time to time took a long draught from his highball, like a man alone musing in a chair.

And finally one night, in the semi-dark, he knocked out his pipe and said to me: "You're very critical of the Party. Why don't you join it?" A thrill went through me, but I laughed, as when somebody has proposed to you and you are not sure whether they are serious. "I don't think I'd make very good material." "You're wrong," he said gravely. "You're just the kind of person the Party needs. You're young and idealistic and independent." I broke in: "I thought independence was just what the Party didn't want." "The Party needs criticism," he said. "But it needs it from the inside. If people like you who agree with its main objectives would come in and criticise, we wouldn't be so narrow and sectarian." "You admit the Party is narrow?" exclaimed my fiancé. "Sure, I admit it," said Ansel, grinning. "But it's partly the fault of people like Mary who won't come in and broaden us." And he confided that he himself made many of the same criticisms I did, but he made them from within the Party, and so could get himself listened to. "The big problem of the American Party," said Ansel, puffing at his pipe, "is the smallness of the membership. People say we're ruled from Moscow; I've never seen any sign of it. But let's suppose it's true, for the sake of argument. This just means that the American Party isn't big enough yet to stand on its own feet. A big, indigenous party couldn't be ruled from Moscow. The will of the members would have to rule it, just as their dues and contributions would support it." "That's where I come in, I suppose?" I said, teasing. "That's where you come in," he calmly agreed. He turned to my fiancé. "Not you," he said. "You won't have the time to give to it. But for Mary I think it would be an interesting experiment."

An interesting experiment. . . . I let the thought wander through my mind. The subject recurred several times, by the lamplight, though with no particular urgency. Ansel, I thought (and still think), was speaking sincerely and partly in my own interest, almost as a spectator, as if he would be diverted to see how I worked out in the Party. All this gave me quite a new sense of Communism and of myself too; I had never looked upon my character in such a favourable light. And as a beneficiary of Ansel's charity, I felt somewhat ashamed of the very doubt it raised: the suspicion that he might be blind to the real facts of inner Party life. I could admire where I could not follow, and, studying Ansel, I decided that I admired the Communists and would probably be one, if I were the person he thought me. Which I was afraid I was not. For me, such a wry conclusion is always uplifting, and I had the feeling that I mounted in understanding when Sunday morning came and I watched Ansel pack his sturdy suitcase and his briefcase full of leaflets into the old roadster. He had never yet driven more than a few yards by himself, and we stood on the front steps to await what was going to happen: he would not be able to get out of the driveway, and we would have to put him on the train and return the car to the Party when we came back to New York. As we watched, the car began to move; it picked up speed and grated into second, holding to the middle of the road as it turned out of the driveway. It hesitated and went into third: Ansel was driving! Through the back window we saw his figure hunched over the wheel; the road dipped and he vanished. We had witnessed a miracle, and we turned back into the house, frightened. All day we sat waiting for the call that would tell us there had been an accident, but the day passed without a sound, and by nightfall we accepted the phenomenon and pictured the little car on the highway,

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travelling steadily west in one indefatigable thrust, not daring to stop for gas or refreshment, lest the will of the driver falter.

This parting glimpse of Ansel through the car's back window was, as it turned out, ultimate. Politically speaking, we reached a watershed that summer. The first Moscow trial took place in August. I knew nothing of this event because I was in Reno and did not see the New York papers. Nor did I know that the Party line had veered to the right and that all the fellow-travellers would be voting, not for Browder as I was now prepared to do (if only I remembered to register), but for Roosevelt. Isolated from these developments in the mountain altitudes, I was blossoming, like a lone winter rose overlooked by the frost, into a revolutionary thinker of the pure, uncompromising strain. The detached particles of the past three years' experience suddenly "made sense," and I saw myself as a radical.

"Book Bites Mary," wrote back a surprised literary editor when I sent him, from Reno, a radiant review of a novel about the Paris Commune that ended with the heroine sitting down to read the Communist Manifesto. In Seattle, when I came to stay with my grandparents, I found a strike on and instantly wired the *Nation* to ask if I could cover it. Every night I was off to the Labor Temple or a longshoreman's hall while my grandparents took comfort from the fact that I seemed to be against Roosevelt, the Democrats, and the tsars of the A. F. of L.—they did not quite grasp my explanation, that I was criticising "from the left."

Right here, I come up against a puzzle: why didn't I take the *next step*? But it is only a puzzle if one thinks of me not as a concrete entity but as a term in a logical operation: you agree with the Communist Party; *ergo*, you join it. I reasoned that way but I did not behave so. There was something in me that capriciously resisted being a term in logic, and the very fact that I cannot elicit any specific reason why I did not join the Party shows that I was never really contemplating it, though I can still hear my own voice, raised very authoritatively at a cafeteria-table at the Central Park Zoo, pointing out to a group of young intellectuals that if we were serious we would join the Communists.

THIS was in September and I was back in New York. The Spanish Civil War had begun. The pay-as-you-go parties were now all for the Loyalists, and young men were volunteering to go and fight in Spain. I read the paper every morning with tears of exaltation in my eyes, and my sympathies rained equally on Communists, Socialists, Anarchists, and the brave Catholic Basques. My heart was tense and swollen with Popular Front solidarity. I applauded the Lincoln Battalion, protested non-intervention, hurried into Wanamaker's to look for cotton-lace stockings: I was boycotting silk on account of Japan in China. I was careful to smoke only union-made cigarettes; the white package with Sir Walter Raleigh's portrait came proudly out of my pocketbook to rebuke Chesterfields and Luckies.

It was a period of intense happiness; the news from the battlefront was often encouraging and the practice of virtue was surprisingly easy. I moved into a one-room apartment on a crooked street in Greenwich Village and exulted in being poor and alone. I had a part-time job and read manuscripts for a publisher; the very riskiness of my situation was zestful—I had decided not to get married. The first month or so was scarifyingly lonely, but I survived this, and, starting early in November, I began to feel the first stirrings of popularity. A new set of people, rather smart and moneyed, young Communists with a little "name," progressive hosts and modernist hostesses, had discovered me. The fact that I was poor and lived in such a funny little apartment increased the interest felt: I was passed from hand to hand, as a novelty, like Gulliver among the Brobdingnagians. During those first days in November, I was chiefly conscious of what a wonderful time I was starting to have. All this while, I had remained ignorant of the fissure that was opening. Nobody had told me of the trial of Zinoviev and Kamnev—the trial of the sixteen —or of the new trial that was being prepared in Moscow, the trial of Pyatakov and Radek.

Then, one afternoon in November, I was taken to a cocktail party, in honour of Art

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Young, the old *Masses* cartoonist, whose book, *The Best of Art Young*, was being published that day. It was the first publisher's party I had ever been to, and my immediate sensation was one of disappointment: nearly all these people were strangers and, to me, quite unattractive. Art Young, a white-haired little kewpie, sitting in a corner, was pointed out to me, and I turned a respectful gaze on him, though I had no clear idea who he was or how he had distinguished himself. I presumed he was a veteran Communist, like a number of the stalwarts in the room, survivors of the old *Masses* and the *Liberator*. Their names were whispered to me and I nodded; this seemed to be a commemorative occasion, and the young men hovered in groups around the old men, as if to catch a word for posterity. On the outskirts of certain groups I noticed a few poorly dressed young men, bolder spirits, nervously flexing their lips, framing sentences that would propel them into the conversational centre, like actors with a single line to speak.

The solemnity of these proceedings made me feel terribly ill-at-ease. It was some time before I became aware that it was not just me who was nervous: the whole room was under a constraint. Some groups were avoiding other groups, and now and then an arrow of sarcasm would wing like a sniper's bullet from one conversation to another.

I was standing, rather bleakly, by the refreshment table, when a question was thrust at me: Did I think Trotsky was entitled to a hearing? It was a novelist friend of mine, dimple-faced, shaggy-headed, earnest, with a whole train of people, like a deputation, behind him. Trotsky? I glanced for help at a sour little man I had been talking with, but he merely shrugged. My friend made a beckoning gesture and a circle closed in. What had Trotsky done? Alas, I had to ask. A tumult of voices proffered explanations. My friend raised a hand for silence. Leaning on the table, he supplied the background, speaking very slowly, in his dragging, disconsolate voice, like a school-teacher wearied of his subject. Trotsky, it appeared, had been accused of fostering a counter-revolutionary plot in the Soviet Union—organising terrorist centres and conspiring with the Gestapo to murder the Soviet leaders. Sixteen old Bolsheviks had confessed and implicated him. It had been in the press since August.

I blushed; everybody seemed to be looking at me strangely. "Where has she *been*?" said a voice. I made a violent effort to take in what had been said. The enormity of the charge dazed me, and I supposed that some sort of poll was being taken and that I was being asked to pronounce on whether Trotsky was guilty or innocent. I could tell from my friend's low, even, melancholy tone that he regarded the charges as derisory. "What do you want me to say?" I protested. "I don't know anything about it." "Trotsky denies the charges," patiently intoned my friend. "He declares it's a GPU fabrication. Do you think he's entitled to a hearing?" My mind cleared. "Why, of course." I laughed—were there people who would say that Trotsky was *not* entitled to a hearing? But my friend's voice tolled a rebuke to this levity. "She says Trotsky is entitled to his day in court."

The sour little man beside me made a peculiar, sucking noise. "You disagree?" I demanded, wonderingly. "I'm smart," he retorted. "I don't let anybody ask me. You notice, he doesn't ask me?" "Shut up, George," said my novelist friend impatiently. "I'm asking *her*. One thing more, Mary," he continued gravely. "Do you believe that Trotsky should have the right of asylum?" The right of asylum! I looked for someone to share my amusement—were we in ancient Greece or the Middle Ages? I was sure the U.S. government would be delighted to harbour such a distinguished foreigner. But nobody smiled back. Everybody watched dispassionately, as for form's sake I assented to the phrasing: yes, Trotsky, in my opinion, was entitled to the right of asylum.

I went home with the serene feeling that all these people were slightly crazy. *Right of asylum, his day in court!*—in a few hours I had forgotten the whole thing.

FOUR days later I tore open an envelope addressed to me by something that called itself "Committee for the Defense of Leon

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Trotsky," and idly scanned the contents. "We demand for Leon Trotsky the right of a fair hearing and the right of asylum." Who were these demanders, I wondered, and, glancing down the letterhead, I discovered my own name. I sat down on my unmade studio couch, shaking. How dared they help themselves to my signature? This was the kind of thing the Communists were always being accused of pulling; apparently, Trotsky's admirers had gone to the same school. I had paid so little heed to the incident at the party that a connection was slow to establish itself. Reading over the list of signers, I recognised "names" that had been present there and remembered my novelist-friend going from person to person, methodically polling. . . .

How were they feeling, I wondered, when they opened their mail this morning? My own feelings were crisp. In two minutes I had decided to withdraw my name and write a note of protest. Trotsky had a right to a hearing, but I had a right to my signature. For even if there had been a legitimate misunderstanding (it occurred to me that perhaps I had been the only person there not to see the import of my answers), nothing I had said committed me to Trotsky's *defence*.

The "decision" was made, but according to my habit I procrastinated. The severe letter I proposed to write got put off till the next day and then the next. Probably I was not eager to offend somebody who had been a good friend to me. Nevertheless, the letter would undoubtedly have been written, had I been left to myself. But within the next forty-eight hours the phone calls began. People whom I had not seen for months or whom I knew very slightly telephoned to advise me to get off the newly formed Committee. These calls were not precisely threatening. Indeed, the caller often sounded terribly weak and awkward, as if he did not like the mission he had been assigned. But they were peculiar. For one thing, they always came after nightfall and sometimes quite late, when I was already in bed. Another thing, there was no real effort at persuasion: the caller stated his purpose in standardised phrases, usually plaintive in tone (the Committee was the tool of reaction, and all liberal people should dissociate themselves from its activities, which were an unwarranted intervention in the domestic affairs of the Soviet Union), and then hung up, almost immediately, before I had a proper chance to answer. Odd too—the voices were not those of my Communist friends but of virtual strangers. These people who admonished me to "think about it" were not people whose individual opinions could have had any weight with me. And when I did think about it, this very fact took on an ominous character: I was not being appealed to personally but impersonally warned.

Behind these phone calls there was a sense of massed power, as if all over the city the Party were wheeling its forces into disciplined formations, like a fleet or an army manœuvring. This, I later found, was true: a systematic telephone campaign was going on to dislodge members from the Committee. The phone calls generally came after dark and sometimes (especially when the recipient was elderly) in the small hours of the morning. The more prominent signers got anonymous messages and threats.

And in the morning papers and the columns of the liberal magazines I saw the results. During the first week, name after name fell off the Committee's letterhead. Prominent liberals and literary figures issued statements deploring their mistake. And a number of people protested that their names had been used without permission. . . .

There, but for the grace of God, went I, I whispered, awestruck, to myself, hugging my guilty knowledge. Only Heaven—I plainly saw—by making me dilatory had preserved me from joining this sorry band. Here was the occasion when I should have been wrestling with my conscience or standing, floodlit, at the crossroads of choice. But in fact I was only aware that I had had a providential escape. I had been saved from having to decide about the Committee; *I* did not decide it—the Communists with their pressure tactics took the matter out of my hands. We all have an instinct that makes us side with the weak, if we do not stop to reason about it, the instinct that makes a householder shield a wounded fugitive

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without first conducting an inquiry into the rights and wrongs of his case. Such "decisions" are simple reflexes; they do not require courage; if they did, there would be fewer of them. When I saw what was happening, I rebounded to the defence of the Committee without a single hesitation—it was nobody's business, I felt, how I happened to be on it, and if anybody had asked me, I should have lied without a scruple.

Of course, I did not foresee the far-reaching consequences of my act—how it would change my life. I had no notion that I was now an anti-Communist, where before I had been either indifferent or pro-Communist. I did, however, soon recognise that I was in a rather awkward predicament—not a moral quandary but a social one. I knew nothing about the cause I had espoused; I had never read a word of Lenin or Trotsky, nothing of Marx but the Communist Manifesto, nothing of Soviet history; the very names of the old Bolsheviks who had confessed were strange and almost barbarous in my ears. As for Trotsky, the only thing that made me think that he might be innocent was the odd behaviour of the Communists and the fellow-travelling liberals, who seemed to be infuriated at the idea of a free enquiry. All around me, in the fashionable Stalinist circles I was now frequenting, I began to meet with suppressed excitement and just-withheld disapproval. Jewelled lady-authors turned white and shook their bracelets angrily when I came into a soirée; rising young men in publishing or advertising tightened their neckties dubiously when I urged them to examine the case for themselves; out dancing in a night-club, tall, collegiate young Party members would press me to their shirt-bosoms and tell me not to be silly, honey.

And since I seemed to meet more Stalinists every day, I saw that I was going to have to get some arguments with which to defend myself. It was not enough, apparently, to say you were for a fair hearing; you had to rebut the entire case of the prosecution to get anybody to incline an ear in your direction. I began to read, headlong, the literature on the case—the pamphlets issued by Trotsky's adherents, the Verbatim Report of the second trial published by the Soviet Union, the "bourgeois" press, the Communist press, the radical press. To my astonishment (for I had scarcely dared think it), the trials did indeed seem to be a monstrous frame-up. The defendant, Pyatakov, flew to Oslo to "conspire" with Trotsky during a winter when, according to the authorities, no planes landed at the Oslo airfield; the defendant, Holtzmann, met Trotsky's son, Sedov, in 1936, at the Hotel Bristol in Copenhagen, which had burned down in 1912; the witness, Romm, met Trotsky in Paris at a time when numerous depositions testified that he had been in Royan, among clouds of witnesses, or on the way there from the south of France.

These were only the most glaring discrepancies—the ones that got in the newspapers. Everywhere you touched the case something crumbled. The carelessness of the case's manufacture was to me its most terrifying aspect; the slovenly disregard for credibility defied credence, in its turn. How did they dare? I think I was more shaken by finding that I was on the right side than I would have been the other way round. And yet, except for a very few people, nobody seemed to mind whether the Hotel Bristol had burned down or not, whether a real plane had landed, whether Trotsky's life and writings were congruent with the picture given of him in the trials. When confronted with the facts of the case, people's minds sheered off from it like jelly from a spoon.

Anybody who has ever tried to rectify an injustice or set a record straight comes to feel that he is going mad. And from a social point of view, he *is* crazy, for he is trying to undo something that is finished, to unravel the social fabric. That is why my liberal friends looked so grave and solemn when I would press them to come to a meeting and listen to a presentation of the facts—for them this was a Decision, too awful to be considered lightly. The Moscow trials were an historical fact and those of us who tried to undo them were uneasily felt to be crackpots, who were trying to turn the clock back. And of course the less we were listened to, the more insistent and earnest we became,

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even while we realised we were doing our cause harm. It is impossible to take a moderate tone under such conditions. If I admitted, though, to being a little bit hipped on the subject of Trotsky, I could sometimes gain an indulgent if flickering attention—the kind of attention that stipulates, "She's a bit off but let's hear her story." And now and then, by sheer chance, one of my hearers would be arrested by some stray point in my narrative; the disparaging smile would slowly fade from his features, leaving a look of blank consternation. He would go off and investigate for himself, and in a few days, when we met again, he would be a crackpot too.

Most of us who became anti-Communists at the time of the trials were drawn in, like me, by accident and almost unwillingly. Looking back, as on a love-affair, a man could say that if he had not had lunch in a certain restaurant on a certain day, he might not have been led to ponder the facts of the Moscow trials. Or not then at any rate. And had he pondered them at a later date, other considerations would have entered and his conversion would have had a different style. On the whole, those of us who became anti-Communists during that year, 1936–37, have remained liberals—a thing that is less true of people of our generation who were converted earlier or later. A certain doubt of orthodoxy and independence of mass opinion was riveted into our anti-Communism by the heat of that period. As soon as I make this statement, exceptions leap into my mind, but I think as a generalisation it will stand. Those who became anti-Communist earlier fell into two classes: the experts and those to whom any socialist ideal was repugnant. Those whose eyes were opened later, by the Nazi-Soviet pact, or still later, by God knows what, were left bruised and full of self-hatred or self-commiseration, because they had palliated so much and truckled to a power-centre; to them, Communism's chief sin seems to be that it deceived *them,* and their public atonement takes on both a vindicating and a vindicative character.

We were luckier. Our anti-Communism came to us neither as the fruit of a special wisdom nor as a humiliating awakening from a prolonged deception, but as a natural event, the product of chance and propinquity. One thing followed another, and the will had little to say about it. For my part, during that year, I realised, with a certain wistfulness, that it was too late for me to become any kind of Marxist. Marxism, I saw, from the learned young man I listened to at Committee meetings, was something you had to take up young, like ballet dancing.

So, I did not try to be a Marxist or a Trotskyite, though for the first time I read a little in the Marxist canon. But I got the name of being a Trotskyite, which meant, in the end, that I saw less of the conventional Stalinists I had been mingling with and less of conventional people generally. (My definition of a conventional person was quite broad: it included anyone who could hear of the Moscow trials and maintain an unruffled serenity.) This, then, was a break or a rupture, not very noticeable at first, that gradually widened and widened, without any conscious effort on my part, sometimes to my regret. This estrangement was not marked by any definite stages; it was a matter of tiny choices. Shortly after the Moscow trials, for instance, I changed from the *Herald-Tribune* to the *Times*; soon I had stopped doing crossword puzzles, playing bridge, reading detective stories and popular novels. I did not "give up" these things; they departed from me, as it were, on tiptoe, seeing that my thoughts were elsewhere.

To change from the *Herald-Tribune* to *the Times,* is not, I am aware, as serious a step as breaking with international Communism when you have been its agent; and it occurs to me that Mr. Chambers and Miss Bentley might well protest the comparison, pointing out that they were profoundly dedicated people, while I was a mere trifler, that their decisions partook of the sublime, where mine descended to the ridiculous—as Mr. Chambers says, he was ready to give his life for his beliefs. Fortunately (though I could argue the point, for we all give our lives for our beliefs, piecemeal or whole), I have a surprise witness to call for my side, who did literally die for his political views.

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I am referring to Trotsky, the small, frail, pertinacious old man who wore whiskers, wrinkles, glasses, shock of grizzled hair, like a gleeful disguise for the erect young student, the dangerous revolutionary within him. Nothing could be more alien to the convulsed and tormented moonscapes of the true confessions of ex-Communists than Trotsky's populous, matter-of-fact recollections set out in *My Life*. I have just been re-reading this volume, and though I no longer subscribe to its views, which have certainly an authoritarian and doctrinaire cast that troubles me today, nevertheless, I experience a sense of recognition here that I cannot find in the pages of our own repentant "revolutionaries." The old man remained unregenerate; he never admitted that he had sinned. That is probably why nobody seems to care for, or feel apologetic to, his memory. It is an interesting point—and relevant, I think, to my story—that many people today actually have the impression that Trotsky died a natural death.

In a certain sense, this is perfectly true. I do not mean that he lived by violence and therefore might reasonably be expected to die by violence. He was a man of words primarily, a pamphleteer and orator. He was armed, as he said, with a pen and peppered his enemies with a fusillade of articles. Hear the concluding passages of his autobiography. "Since my exile, I have more than once read musings in the newspapers on the subject of the 'tragedy' that has befallen me. I know no *personal* tragedy. I know the change of two chapters of revolution. One American paper which published an article of mine accompanied it with a profound note to the effect that in spite of the blows the author had suffered, he had, as evidenced by his article, preserved his clarity of reason. I can only express my astonishment at the philistine attempt to establish a connection between the power of reasoning and a government post, between mental balance and the present situation. I do not know, and I never have known, of any such connection. In prison, with a book or pen in my hand, I experienced the same sense of deep satisfaction that I did at mass-meetings of the revolution. I felt the mechanics of power as an inescapable burden, rather than as a spiritual satisfaction."

This was not a man of violence. Nevertheless, one can say that he died a natural death—a death that was in keeping with the open manner of his life. There was nothing arcane in Trotsky; that was his charm. Like an ordinary person, he was hospitably open to hazard and accident. In his autobiography, he cannot date the moment when he became a socialist.

One factor in his losing out in the power-struggle at the time of Lenin's death was his delay in getting the telegram that should have called him home from the Caucasus, where he was convalescing, to appear at Lenin's funeral—*had* he got the telegram, perhaps the outcome would have been different. Or again, perhaps not. It may be that the whims of chance are really the importunities of design. But if there is a Design, it aims, in real lives, like the reader's or mine or Trotsky's, to look natural and fortuitous; that is how it gets us into its web.

Trotsky himself, looking at his life in retrospect, was struck, as most of us are on such occasions, by the role chance had played in it. He tells how one day, during Lenin's last illness, he went duck-shooting with an old hunter in a canoe on the River Dubna, walked through a bog in felt boots—only a hundred steps—and contracted influenza. This was the reason he was ordered to Sukhu for the cure, missed Lenin's funeral, and had to stay in bed during the struggle for primacy that raged that autumn and winter. "I cannot help noting," he says, "how obligingly the accidental helps the historical law. Broadly speaking, the entire historical process is a refraction of historical law through the accidental. In the language of biology, one might say that the historical law is realised through the natural selection of accidents." And with a faint touch of quizzical gaiety he sums up the problem as a Marxian: "One can foresee the consequences of a revolution or a war, but it is impossible to foresee the consequences of an autumn shooting-trip for wild ducks." This shrug before the unforeseen implies an acceptance of consequences that is a far cry from penance and prophecy. Such, it concedes, is life. *Bravo*, old sport, I say, even though the hall is empty.

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Comment

THE POETRY OF SPORT

THE classical Greek, German, or generally European adulation of the body has always been in England a matter for suspicion. In Europe, sport is frequently a shop-window in which the body's robust development is undressed: the English train their bodies only as a means of improving their standard of play. Implicit in the English view seems to be the idea that sport is primitive competition: analysis, however, might lead to a definition nearer to "a moving poetry." The fascination of the great spectator-sports—soccer, athletics, cricket, lawn tennis—is partly due to the effect of the game on its audience. What instinct does it satisfy? and what kind of pleasure does it produce? There are, of course, several answers: the obvious ones would be in terms of technical skill, the desire to see the best pitted against the best, the lost urban individual's need to identify himself with wider, more exciting issues, the primary urge to achievement, dulled in a machined society, the wish for relaxation. Yet the true answer is probably that top-class sport satisfies the humbly educated man's desire for beauty (though, of course, not only his): he understands the symbols and social background as other men have the key to Proust. There is in neither case a short-cut. Some sports, football for instance, are closely related to the class structure, produced predominantly by and for the "workers"—if one uses that word in its old-fashioned meaning. The power of modern football can only be understood in an industrial town where the pitch is an oasis, lit by the lamps of a mass imagination. Cricket, with its wider history, its warmer, more open images, cuts across these divisions as do many other games. The Englishman, though he cries "beautiful, beautiful" more often than anything else when he is pleased at a move in the game, would perhaps nevertheless be disconcerted by any æsthetic concept of sport. He does not care for any element of *mystique* in his pleasures. And beauty in English eyes carries within it the germ of decadence. There is respect for balance, harmony, intelligence, directness—all components of beauty—but to the ordinary man the idea of beauty as an abstraction, carrying visual or emotional overtones, tends to seem sentimental or luxurious and therefore inessential. Industrial man lives on essentials.

Yet this is due to a false understanding of poetry and beauty, to his failure to realise that they are bred of life, not separate from it. The images that an industrial workman would naturally be moved by, would not be those he thought beautiful. His environment could be given beauty, but only when seen from outside by, say, a film director, a writer, or a painter: the man to whom the black, smoking suburb was home, having it in his blood as his natural inheritance, would not see it as an arresting visual experience. Yet his craving for beauty remains, even if he confuses the terms and fails to recognise its achievement. It is in professional sport that this craving is most nearly satisfied: it is for its provision of an accessible kind of art, created in realistically dramatic conditions, that each week millions line the cramped terraces of football stadiums, in dripping, rusty, autumnal weather, on metallic, iron-coloured, freezing afternoons.

THIS poetic atmosphere requires elaboration; but sport has many techniques, each of which transmits, against its background, a separate kind of poetry, in turn containing different general ideas. Henry de Montherlant's fascinating book, *Paysage des Olympiques*—a photograph album with a brilliantly perceptive commentary—analyses some of these ideas, and is revealing especially in its demonstration of how French and British attitudes to sport differ —though Montherlant of course represents

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no one but himself, and his views bear no relation to current ideas, but stem from an idealisation of medieval history as a nobleman might read it.

Montherlant's main concern is to establish the magic of the human body, in its ever-greater perfection the crucible as well as the far shore of human attainment. Montherlant's attitude, though parts of his text might have been written by D. H. Lawrence, parts by a Nazi propagandist, is essentially that of a feudal æsthete who also believes in the classical conception of the all-round man. The names that sprinkle his essay are Simonides, Herodotus, Schiller, Walter Pater, and Rousseau. The Nazis certainly created a scheme of things in which sport, the game itself, was only a means to improve the body and so the quality of the soldier. But Montherlant does not quite do that, though he sees beauty most in what the body is, not in its skill, nor in the pictorial associations of the game, its technique and its tension. Many of the photographs in *Paysage des Olympiques*—taken, incidentally, by a Czech, Karel Egermeier—show the lyrical surfaces, sprung rhythms, and pure enthusiasms of adolescent bodies—what Montherlant calls "the third sex." The camera, assisted by Montherlant's prose, captures the physical, rather than technical, essence of sport—the planes and lines of the striving body, grace and strength, the muted music of the coordinated runner—qualities which made Leni Riefenstahl's film of the Berlin Olympiad such an affecting and beautiful work. Half of the pictures are football landscapes, boys with huge wistful eyes in papery white faces posing with a football at their feet and winter sharp against a sky of ice behind them; mud-caked goalkeepers crouching in front of netting beyond which factory chimneys—Montherlant compares them to "monstrous steamers in port"—stick up over playgrounds turned into seas by the spilled sky; a butterfly at the moment of alighting on a foot arched for its leather football boot; training-runs through woods suddenly rung with sunlight, the caves of leaves seeming to echo like churches. Other pictures create the rhythm of girl athletes running under early and mist-hung skies, men diving, girls balanced for the pistol's annunciation at the start of the 100 yards, boys practising kicking, passing or tackling, with autumn loose around them, each photograph investing the human figures with almost tragic significance—as if the contrast between autumn and adolescence symbolised the sadness of the human equation, the ephemerality of unawareness before the melancholy rituals of love. Yet these pictures are also instinct with hope, grace and movement: "the essence of sport," Montherlant wrote, "is movement," and the title he wanted to give his book was *La Grâce humaine*.

It is the fusion of hope and memory that constitutes for Montherlant the poetry of sport: the hopefulness of youth, the acts of memory that squeeze out of nostalgia a particular emotion. If he had to try and recall on his death-bed what life was about, what quickened it into richness and gave it meaning, Montherlant wrote in his introduction, he would probably do so by remembering the moment at which a runner draws away from the field, or an inspired pass made to him at football, indicative as it was of a colleague's confidence. "Certainly I shouldn't worry over why the Midi has produced no poets."

WHEN boredom is the fate of the passive artisan, the idle bourgeois, sport provides both a drama and a commentary of its own: the football stadium brings to an outdoor climax the same kind of drama as the theatre. The highlights of a game, a spectacular save, a balanced evasive run, a passage of inspired passing, equally a delicate late-cut, a leg-glance or authoritative off-drive at cricket, become evocative images the mind stores and to whose poetry it returns with relish.

Nowadays, perhaps, only a patrician intellectual would admit to a pleasure in war, aware of what it meant. Montherlant has done this, and in this essay he says sport is its ideal continuation. What he, like many others less eloquent, enjoyed was a sense of heightened tension, a contrived but inevitable situation in which everything had meaning. Sport provides this elation and excitement that is akin to that produced by music or poetry or painting. Also, when the idea of sport sees man in a cooperative role, with a care for performance, neither dominant nor narcissistic, it draws out the same selflessness and heroism as war, but scaled down to familiar proportions.

Sport therefore can be the sublimation of the warring instinct, or an encouragement of it, according to taste. It can be cruel and beautiful, expressive of many instincts: even the cock-

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fighting for which Socrates had so great a passion was not without the power to suggest noble images. It has, however, no more to do with morality than art: it is similarly good or bad in execution, beautiful in itself or trivial according to quality.

An aspect of sport attractive to Montherlant is its requirement of almost monastic discipline for exceptional success. Once more, the ascetic and the artist find a common identity. The devotion and the denial of the athlete are rewarded by the perfection of his performance, the purity of line that it produces.

Nevertheless, it is not so much his feeling for the *grâce humaine* of sport, nor his austere ideals of physical perfection, that make Montherlant's writing on the subject so impressive. To most people his dedication, the raising of sport into a religion with its own ethos, its own priesthood, would seem altogether too intense. Yet it is precisely his autocracy of temperament, his ability to refine a thing down to its essentials, that makes Montherlant's vision valuable and exciting. His writing on sport enlarges its territory, endows it with order, understanding, philosophy. The French habitually overuse abstractions, so that the truth shrinks inside an expanding balloon of qualifications. But Montherlant's prose is never other than final, cutting, exquisitely mannered: when he uses a word like *gloire* it acquires in its icy context a unique passion.

If any examination of the idea of sport today throws up these two concepts—mass-man seeking in sport an art he understands, a beauty whose technology is known to him, and individual man looking for a means of acquiring human grace, of achieving a poetry of motion, a physical harmony—they may well reinforce one another more than is apparent. For if one thinks about it, sport produces arts in which men and women become beautiful in their skill: few top-class athletes are graceful in themselves. They achieve harmony through the right use of faculties trained for particular purposes. Because of this the real poetry of a game is never evident to the casual observer. To understand, for example, the lyrical power of the Cup Final, of an Association football international between England and Austria, a long and serious apprenticeship is required. When Lindwall and Miller are bowling to Hutton and Compton in a Test Match, you again have authentic drama of the most complex kind. For the medium in which the great sportsman works is intricate and plastic, with the added resistance that comes from the unpredictability of his opponent. Like the artist, he seeks to dictate conditions, to impose his own pattern.

Sport, however, contains more than individual gestures. The lovely flowing action of Larwood, the drop volley of Tilden, both implying withheld power, the running of Pirie or Owens or Mrs. Blankers-Koehn, the dexterity of Indian hockey players, a sustained movement by the Tottenham Hotspur team of 1951, the endurance of Zatopek—these are isolated things, existing more deeply in relation to their background. The more the background of each individual sport is understood the more significant does the game become. Montherlant suggested to André Gide, when the latter was editor of the *Nouvelle Revue Française*, that he contribute a regular article on sport. The articles were not a success, Montherlant notes, because the *N.R.F.*'s readers were not equipped to understand the detail of what Montherlant wanted to say—and without going into the technical and sociological subtleties that for him were the whole fascination, he found there was nothing worth saying. For sport is a country's landscape and its communities under a microscope. The names of English football grounds—Molineux, Villa Park, White Hart Lane, The Hawthorns, Turf Moor—are to those who know them a litany of grey streets, hardware stores, fruit barrows, chapels, mission halls, brass bands, and stunted trees. But somewhere in these stone nightmares the oasis exists. From their surroundings the great cricket grounds of Headingley and Old Trafford and the Oval acquire their special meanings.

There may not seem much in common between Egermeier's stylised portraits in *Paysage des Olympiques* and the brilliant, but accidentally, composed sports pictures in daily papers. Egermeier and Montherlant have deliberately gone out after the arresting physical image, tracking it down like naturalists with butterfly nets. But out of range of the camera, in the huge stadiums of the north, the sardine-packed crowds have it constantly at their fingertips. They may not be able to translate their experience of it, but the passion of their interest warms all the same the disinterested beauty of athletic performance into glowing life.

Alan Ross

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Letter from New Delhi

AFTER NEHRU . . . ?

JAWAHARLAL NEHRU was sixty-four on November 14th last. As each birthday of the Prime Minister comes and goes, there is renewed questioning, both here and abroad, of the prospects in India when his influence recedes. It is recognised that his position is unique; as the last surviving hero of the Indian Union and as President of the Indian National Congress, he has a range of power which cannot be grasped by any future Prime Minister of India. The scenes on his birthday showed this well enough. The Community Projects Administrator presented him with a birthday gift of 275 schools—i.e. promises, signed by villages, to build these schools in the next few months. Thousands of people flocked to his official residence to convey their felicitations; the poor were more conspicuous by far than the rich. And the Prime Minister took time off to review a children's parade at the National Stadium; there, he was Kaka Nehru (Uncle Nehru) to all. A few months ago, when he captained a cricket team of members of Parliament in the same stadium, the stands were filled every time it was known that he was on the field. He bowled one over, made one run, and fielded three balls in two hours of play. But the vast crowds were delighted; his presence exhilarated them. So it still does, to almost everyone, almost everywhere. He is the only public speaker in India who can draw a hundred thousand strong; and yet he is no orator, and his public speeches tend to ring the changes on a strictly limited set of themes. No obvious explanation of Jawaharlal Nehru's ascendancy over the people seems possible; but as a fact it is undeniable, and many people in India are genuinely afraid, having got used to this fact, that there will be a dangerous vacuum after his departure. Some talk feebly about training a successor, knowing perfectly well in their hearts that, for just this place, no successor can ever be trained.

Because of the central position Nehru occupies in the Indian scene, it is all too easy to believe that unity of India is a fragile thing, dependent on the life of a man already sixty-four (in a country which has just decided that at sixty-five a man is unfitted by age to be a director of a company). And yet it should be clear, after the deaths of Mahatma Gandhi in 1948 and Sadar Vallabhbhai Patel in 1950, that the stability of India is made of more impersonal stuff. Both losses, believed at the time to be catastrophic, have made little difference to the steady march of events. And this is not because the mantle of the Mahatma and the great Sardar have descended on Nehru. Today, Jawaharlal Nehru is not the accepted leader of the Gandhians. That role has been captured by Acharya Vinoba Bhave, who was made, and lives, much in the image of his Master. Many Gandhians owe no allegiance to Nehru. Though the Master's blessing provided the initial act of succession, the Gandhian legend, which is in any case rapidly declining, is now seen not to have been a necessary condition of India's unity.

Equally revealing were the consequences—or lack of them, rather—of the death of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel. In view of the commanding position which the great Sardar occupied in the Congress party, it was believed his authoritative hand would be greatly missed. But those gloomy prophets who believed that the Indian State would take a sharp turn to the Left after Vallabhbhai's departure have been agreeably surprised to find that, if anything, the Government of India has moved Right. It was the economic realities of India, and not Vallabhbhai Patel, that were really shaping policy.

Both politically and economically, therefore, an adjustment of perspective is needed. The mind of Nehru is, and yet is not, the mind of India. Or if the voice is Nehru's, the hands belong elsewhere. The hands in fact belong to the strong impersonal frame of Indian society;

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it is set firm. Obstinately and even irritatingly stationary down the ages, Indian society is now exhibiting some of the virtues of its defects.

THE basic explanation of the even tenor of life in India since Independence is to be sought in the tremendous cohesion of Indian society. Partition and the creation of Pakistan tore India apart and left a gaping wound in India's political and economic life. But it has also taken out of the body politic the cancer of communalism which was eating into its vitals. As a result, Indian society has been left without a major internal political grievance liable to provoke violence. The splendid maintenance of law and order is much more a result of the disappearance of old animosities than of the efficiency of the administrative services. It is significant that the Home Minister of the Government of India, by no means of the same stature as Vallabhbhai Patel, holds both his Ministries—the Home and State Ministries—and seems to have much time to spare. In the last five years, the States have not once invoked the military aid of the Central Government in fulfilment of their obligations to uphold law and order.

During these same five years, all the recognised bonds of stability in the country have suffered some weakening. First, the overwhelming power of the Congress Party has been diminished in the face of a substantial, and growing, opposition. Secondly, "the steel frame"—as the higher administrative hierarchy was once appropriately described by David Lloyd George—has lost both confidence and power. Thirdly, while the loyalty and efficiency of the Indian army is unquestioned, the lack of integration of the State armies and the inadequacy of officers' salaries is affecting military morale. Fourthly, the economic pressure on India's middle classes, still the most solid element in the body politic, has significantly increased with the rise of the cost of living. Thus practically every major bond of unity has been weakened; and yet the whole shows no basic fragmentation. Obviously, a major factor has been left out of account.

This common factor is partly religious, partly social in origin. Now that Moslem influence has definitely receded, there is an even greater approximation over the whole country to what has been described, vaguely enough, as "the Hindu way of life"; a kind of philosophic calm set in a framework in which the injunctions of the *sastras* have got encased in people's minds by a hard crust of custom. Reinforcing this, there is the small peasant's way of approaching his traditional calling: the demand for economic progress has set an explosive in the midst of the static Indian society, but the fuse has not been lit; and it is not yet known whether the Indian village provides combustible material. The Indian peasant, by and large, has fared well since Independence. The average prices of his produce are 25 per cent higher than they were in August, 1947, and the agricultural standard of living has certainly risen since 1939: it has been estimated, admittedly on very insufficient data, that agricultural indebtedness has been halved. Until recently, rains have not been very favourable, but the peasant does not blame political parties for the vagaries of the monsoons. Accustomed, as he has been down the ages, to variations from a 4-anna to a 20-anna crop, he has not been trained to estimate economic progress with the statistical refinements which modern economists are so free to use. And he is therefore less appalled by some of the dismal figures which are so often shouted at him.

The General Elections at the end of 1951 and the beginning of 1952 were not held at a time most helpful to Congress governments in the various States. Nineteen-fifty-one was a bad agricultural year: food was scarce and prices high. The middle classes, too, had good reasons for complaint: their standard of living had certainly declined since independence, and unemployment was growing. This was a splendid opportunity for the electorate to vent displeasure on the Congress. In point of fact, however, it was the Leftist parties that were rebuked. Out of 105,987,317 votes cast in elections for seats in the House of the People, the Socialist Party received 11,126,000, the Communist Party only 4,712,000. The Congress Party obtained no fewer than 47,528,000 votes. In the last two years there is evidence that the Congress stock is declining; but there is no significant evidence that the country wishes ardently to go Left.

THE truth seems to be that the Indian Revolution has, for the time being—which may be many years—been suspended. This is not, as is often believed, the result of the power of

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"vested interests." It is almost entirely the result of the mind of the small man with a piece of land of his own; he is anxious to escape the landlord's tribute, but with the abolition of landlordism his interest ends. Collectivisation of the land makes no appeal at all; even co-operative farming is distrusted. Food control was abandoned by Mr. Rafi Ahmed Kidwai, the agile Food Minister, who, though a professing socialist, emerged as the friend and advocate of free enterprise. The explanation was simple. Mr. Kidwai, and through him, the Prime Minister, are more astute as politicians than they are consistent as philosophers. They accepted the popular mood rather than attempt to convert it to the socialist faith.

The idea that the people of India ardently wish additional powers to be assumed by the government in order to quicken the rate of economic development is now being increasingly discounted. And there is a significant reason for this to be found in some of the interesting figures contained in the First Report of the National Income Committee for the official year 1948–49. According to this Committee, 61·3 per cent of India's enterprises are to be classified as "small"; only 12 per cent are large; and as many as 26·7 per cent are "unclassified" and may possibly be taken as medium. It is an essentially property-respecting attitude which lies behind the cautious judgement of the Indian people in the last general elections. It is likely that this will continue to prevail as against the demand for economic "progress" at any price. In any case, the government's present plans envisage a doubling of per capita income about twenty-five years from now. Even the First Five Year Plan is designed to secure a per capita advance at the rate of 1 per cent per year. The Second Five Year Plan, now under preparation, will more than double this rate. There is not likely, therefore, to be a choice presented in the form of Stability against Economic Progress. The average Indian may fairly hope to have both.

The fact that the stability of India rests in the impersonal character of the Indian countryside detracts somewhat from the political romance which surrounds Jawaharlal Nehru. But at least it makes unnecessary the frantic search for a successor, which has occupied so much time in the last two years. All in all, if the weather continues no worse than it has already been, this ship will safely come to port, even, if necessary, without its captain on the bridge.

Eric da Costa

WINTER

No sound; no breath;
Snow fell. Snow fell on me,
Not from the sky on which a child looks up
Like an enclosing cup.
Snow fell from outer space,
Kissing continually
With calm, uncaring death
My upturned face.

Frances Cornford

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Communications

THE DEATH PENALTY

SIR—I am not exactly clear what the denial by Signor Silone and his friends to the State of a *right* to inflict capital punishment may mean. But, in any event, as an opponent of capital punishment I cannot but feel that it is not the best line of approach to the problem—at any rate, in non-metaphysical English-speaking countries. Whether the State has such a right or not, we have to face the fact that the majority of people believe that it has this right, and that therefore merely to state the proposition that it has not got such a right does not make converts to the cause of abolition. No one disputes Beccaria's proposition that a hanging does no good to the man hanged, but many people think that it does good to the rest of society in that it deters other murderers. Surely, therefore, the real point to make, if we wish to carry the issue, is to show from experience and statistics that capital punishment is not a necessary or an effective deterrent. The details of the experience of countries where experiments of abolition have been tried, which have been so carefully collected by the Royal Commission and published in Appendix VI of their Report, most convincingly demonstrate this. And, while my object is the same as that of Signor Silone, I feel that that object is far more likely to be attained by directing attention to the consequences in practice rather than by enunciating a metaphysic which, whether it be valid or not, is not universally accepted.

CHRISTOPHER HOLLIS, M.P.

House of Commons,
London, S.W.1

ENGLISH IDEAS ABOUT SEX

SIR—Mr. Geoffrey Gorer's sex questionnaire—as given in his article, "English Ideas about Sex," in the December issue of ENCOUNTER—was, I believe, addressed exclusively to the readers of the Sunday newspaper, *The People*. "Tell me what you read and I'll tell you what you are," wrote Sainte-Beuve. Although it is not a foolproof axiom, I doubt whether the "typical" reader of ENCOUNTER has many attitudes in common with the "typical" reader of, say, *Reveille*. (A comparison of the results of a poll run by the two magazines on the subject of capital punishment would, I think, be instructive.) This, of course, is the old highbrow/lowbrow classification which can be applied easily enough to the field of Sunday newspapers, *The Observer* as opposed to *The People*, for example. But even if attention is restricted to the so-called "popular" field, and when suitable allowance has been made for an overlapping in readership, it is clear that the general outlook of the readers of *The People* will differ in many respects from that of readers of the *Sunday Express*. *The People's* politics are left of centre and may be defined loosely as socialist; the *Sunday Express* is avowedly conservative. In neither paper is its political outlook limited to the editorial columns. Compare the attitudes of the two papers to society: Arthur Helliwell, *The People's* columnist, treats it as a kind of *demi-monde*, dominated by show-people and speculators. Ephraim Hardcastle, in the *Sunday Express*, is primarily interested in the peerage. Unlike Helliwell, his observations are wide-eyed and approving. These columnists and their respective papers cater for two conflicting bodies of public opinion which differ not merely politically. Dr. H. J. Eysenck, with whose work Mr. Gorer is no doubt familiar, has amply demonstrated how considerably a person's political opinions affect his normal moral judgements, and vice versa. Thus, drawing on the evidence of surveys made in this country, he has concluded that the conservative has a greater tendency towards anti-semitism than the socialist. The point I wish to make is this: had Mr. Gorer conducted his survey among readers of the *Sunday Express* his results would have been appreciably different. With his present data, his brisk generalisations about so complex a topic as "English Ideas about Sex" are, to say the least, premature.

GEOFFREY MINISH

Hove, Sussex

[Geoffrey Gorer replies:—Mr. Minish is incorrect in a number of his assumptions. By no means all the

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respondents to the questionnaire were regular readers of *The People*; the majority were, but a considerable number came from other sources. As a scientific guard against bias, a considerable number of the questions were asked simultaneously of a proportional (Gallup poll style) sample by interviewers. The views of the two samples are in nearly all cases very similar.

A more important fallacy is the implication that most English people only take one Sunday newspaper, and that they choose it on the basis of their political predilections. This does not appear to be true of the papers with mass circulation (see the very revealing statistics of the *Hulton Readership Survey*); in the case of my sample 35 per cent regularly saw at least one other weekly paper and 45 per cent did so frequently. These papers were usually the *News of the World* or the *Sunday Express*. There is very little evidence of strong political bias.

I admit that my sample represents poorly the probable readers of ENCOUNTER or *The Observer*. I am attempting to deal with the total English population: the élite, measured either by years of full-time education, income, or social class (upper and part of upper middle) only represent between one and two per cent of the total population. My sample is also inadequate for the very bottom of the social scale, where literacy becomes a problem. By most criteria my sample is adequate for about 95 per cent of the population; if Mr. Minish will wait till the relevant tables are published he can base his criticisms on something more than hunches.

GEOFFREY GORER]

ONE-WAY PIGEONS

SIR—In the first part of Melvin J. Lasky's interesting piece on Japan, on page 9 of the November number of ENCOUNTER, I read, in the description of the *Mainichi* newspaper offices, the following passage:—

"On the roof there were a hundred pigeons in the *hato bu*, the carrier department, ready to wing off to the provinces at forty miles an hour and return with a negative and a thin paper dispatch in their metal tubes."

Was Mr. Lasky ever actually present at the briefing of one of these truly remarkable birds?

For your information, carrier-pigeon traffic is, as you might say, one-way only; the bird is released and, within certain limits of time and space, will probably find its way home. The pigeons Mr. Lasky saw on the roof of the newspaper offices were no doubt, like the Speed-Graphics he saw in another department, simply waiting to be taken along and used by any reporter who felt it might prove inconvenient or impossible to use the telephone to convey his story to the newspaper—or for any other reason you care to think of.

But you can't send birds on errands!

J. M. LEBRECHT-ELLIS

Menton
(*Alpes-Maritimes*)

[Mr. Lasky comments:—It is not that I didn't know the one-way limitation of our pigeon friends, but my phrasing was very careless. I did see on the top of the *Mainichi* building the collection of nicely woven straw-baskets in which the reporters took the pigeons out on a story. Nevertheless, I stand corrected.]

DR. PROUT

SIR—The lines about Dr. Prout in Mr. W. H. Auden's article "Words and Music" in the January issue of ENCOUNTER are indeed "prosodically admirable" as words for Bach's G minor fugue, but far more so if correctly quoted:—

O Ebenezer Prout,
You very funny man,
And how did you come
To hit upon the plan?
But you can't write fugues
(If anybody can)
As well as Bach, who never had his master
Since time began.

They are, of course, not by Prout, whose "lyrics" to Bach fugue subjects are seldom so diverting; they are, I think, by Sir Frederick Bridge.

B. A. YOUNG

London, S.W.

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BOOKS

THE TEACHING OF HISTORY

As a writer of history, I am often asked this question: Why do not historians or teachers of different nations consult with one another to establish agreed and dispassionate statements for their text-books?

In one way, the frequency with which I am asked this question is encouraging: it reveals a constructive, indeed an idealistic, attitude on the part of the questioner. But to anyone concerned with modern progress towards international understanding, it is also rather discouraging. For as long as I can remember, historians and teachers of different nations—of some different nations anyway—have been getting together, formally or informally, to discuss this very problem. They do it now with the encouragement of UNESCO; they did it earlier with the encouragement of the League of Nations; and they have done it from time to time without any official encouragement at all. Yet the general public remains almost unaware of their efforts.

It is true that, hitherto, such efforts have achieved comparatively little. But earnest aspirations are easy targets for criticism, especially when they appear to seek the unattainable. Many, if not most, reforms have been achieved by those who disregarded the sceptics and continued to aim at the impossible.

This by way of apologia for my own uncertainties. I have been aware for long enough of these efforts towards the improvement of history teaching in the interests of international understanding, but I have always viewed their prospects of success with scepticism. My arguments may be briefly summarised as follows. History is, by its nature, unsuitable for a school subject. It deals with the behaviour of adult human beings in a highly complex world, and can only be brought within the understanding of immature human beings with little experience of the world by a process of compression and simplification which is necessarily misleading. Of course, simplified and compressed school history can be interestingly and amusingly taught, but over the years I had come more and more to question whether it could be fully, wisely or even harmlessly taught. Of all subjects, it degenerates most easily and dangerously into propaganda. In a tranquil and tolerant world agreed the dispassionate text-books might be written, but in our increasingly noisy and intolerant world no general improvement seemed likely. With such arguments I shrugged off responsibility and joined, if not with those who mocked at nobler aspirations, at least with those who despaired of them.

Disillusion may, however, be a cover for mental laziness. History as a school subject has become, irrevocably, an important part of education in most countries. It is therefore a duty to consider what measures ought ideally to be taken and what measures can be taken to minimise the dangers and increase the benefits of teaching this depressingly adult subject to children.

The necessity for facing rather than shirking the problem has been strongly brought home to me by reading two comprehensive and intelligent books recently issued by UNESCO in the series *Towards World Understanding*. This series is directed to teachers, but the two books in question, both short, pithy, and well written, are of great general interest. The first is *Suggestions on the Teaching of*

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*History** by C. P. Hill and the second is *History Text-books and International Understanding*† by J. A. Lauwerys. Each book is the outcome of discussions at an international seminar where teachers from many different countries met. Each is essentially practical; pious hopes are reduced to a minimum, and the bulk of the text is devoted to constructive suggestions and the description of existing conditions.

The chief problems in teaching history are the immaturity of the pupils, the necessarily brief time that can be allocated to it in the curriculum, the necessity of fitting historical studies into the general pattern of the syllabus, to a lesser degree, the cost of books and equipment; finally, the teacher's limitations.

> The teacher of history must be devoted to truth, and be known to be devoted to it; scrupulous in his accuracy, critical in handling detailed evidence, yet never unwilling to admit ignorance. . . . He needs integrity, a sane and balanced judgement, and a wide appreciation of varied human beings.

Alas, Mr. Hill's paragon is rare.

Another question which Mr. Hill raises both directly and by implication throughout his book is the true purpose of history teaching. Is it education for citizenship? Can history give the child a better understanding of the world, a wider sense of values, a more accurate perspective? How far is historical education political, how far moral? In what way can history be used to stimulate and develop the critical faculty? For, if no subject is as dangerous as history, no subject offers so rich an opportunity for educating the child and the adolescent in balanced judgement. It can be used, perceptively, to teach even quite a young child to discriminate between fact and opinion —a discrimination which is vitally important, and which nine out of ten adults are unable to make.

The terrifying success of certain propagandist ideas—British imperialism, the wickedness of the Jews, etc.—is in part due to the inability of the average man or woman to disentangle fact from opinion. Such ideas, and many more, are in essence *historic*; they are more or less rooted in ancient opinions and prejudices but they derive much of their strength from the popular misconception that they are somehow supported and proved by the study of history. Many people, in all classes of society, still leave school without either knowledge or taste for history, but a simple conviction that it deals with facts in the same incontrovertible way as the multiplication table. Such people are particularly open to arguments beginning with the magic words "History proves," or "History teaches." The silliest, the wildest, and the wickedest political propaganda is often presented in precisely this way. Its success is due, at least in part, to bad, dull, and uncritical history-teaching in past generations. History *properly taught* is the best available means for providing the average child with the judgement to distinguish between truth, half-truth, and falsehood, and between hard fact and mere opinion.

> In the field of method [writes Mr. Hill] the use of documents or of text-books giving different interpretations of the same event, and of newspapers of opposite political views is particularly valuable; and it is no negligible achievement if pupils realise that on some historical events no final decision can be reached.

This is history teaching at its best; if it were often at its best there would hardly be any need for the revision of text-books in the interests of international understanding. Pupils would recognise opinion when they saw it, and set text-book against text-book as interesting but not necessarily authoritative examples of different points of view.

Such teaching is still comparatively rare and is not, in any case, suitable for the younger pupils. Dr. Lauwerys' book, which is a valuable pendant to Mr. Hill's, pursues the important and confused problem of the history text-book. Countries differ very greatly in their attitude, from those in which the Ministry of Education directly controls the books in use, to those in which it gives complete freedom. Price may exercise a rigid control of another sort; it is depressing to learn that second-rate text-books are often chosen in preference to better but more expensive ones.

Mr. Lauwerys is particularly interesting on the central question of clear communication with the child. General terms and abstract ideas puzzle the child, but simple words mislead him. "By the first century B.C. the Romans had won hegemony in the

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* *Suggestions on the Teaching of History*. UNESCO. 4s.

† *History Text-books and International Understanding*. UNESCO. 4s.

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Mediterranean region," may mean nothing at all to a ten-year-old. "A Roman General, Julius Cæsar, wanted to conquer Gaul" gives him a clear but wholly misleading picture. These two quotations from elementary text-books significantly illustrate the dilemma of the teacher between accurate incomprehensibility on the one side and misleading simplification on the other.

This points me back towards the cowardly sentiments with which I began. History is not a suitable subject for children. There, rather than in the biassed statements of text-books, lies its real danger. The propagation of views disturbing to international understanding in history text-books and by history lessons is only one of the many unfortunate results which arise when a complex subject has to be presented in a very short time to very young minds.

Since history is being taught, has been taught, and will long continue to be taught in schools, the best we can hope for is a wider general understanding of its true educational value and of the dangers and problems which are involved in its study.

C. V. Wedgwood

MARIA KUNCEWICZ

The Forester

The scene of this story is Poland in 1848. A middle-class Pole falls in love with the local Countess, whose profligate life brings her to bankruptcy, but he eventually turns to a woman of his own class, and the story continues with their children as affected by the troubled times.

"This novel has a quality very rare in English literature. It combines the boldness of a poet with a robust realism which makes use of any detail, however homely or worldly, to convey a scene with the greatest exactitude and clearness."
Storm Jameson. 10*s.* 6*d.*

HUTCHINSON

A CONTEMPORARY EPIC

Am I dotty? For some fifteen years now Mr. David Jones has made me ask myself this question. When *In Parenthesis* came out in 1938, I thought it—I think so still—the greatest book about the First World War that I had read. But nobody seemed to notice or write about it. Having lived with *The Anathemata** for the last ten months, I feel as certain as one can feel of anything that it is one of the most important poems of our time. But where are the bells? Where are the cannon? I have given it to friends whose literary taste I have always found reliable (true, they are Americans), and they seem to be completely baffled by it. I cannot, therefore, write an evaluatory review, for that presupposes, or should presuppose, that the public are well acquainted with the text: I can only attempt to describe the sort of poem it is, the sort of thing I believe Mr. Jones is trying to do. Let us consider the style first.

Before the drift
was over the lime-face.
Sometime between the final and the penultimate débâcle.
(Already Arcturus deploys his reconnoitering
chills in greater strength: soon his last *Putsch*
on any scale.)
Before this all but proto-historic transmogrification of the land-face.
Just before they rigged the half-lit stage for dim-eyed Clio
to step with some small confidence the measures of her
brief and lachrymal pavan.

* *The Anathemata.* By David Jones. Faber and Faber. 25*s.*

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Plucked with his jack bucket from
the Punic foreshore b' a bollocky great Bocco
procurer, or
I weren't christed Elen Monica in Papey Juxta
Muram. 'V'a
mind to sign him Austin Gregorians in Thames-
water, an'
ransom him with m'own woman's body.

* * *

Within, with lights brighted
under the dressed beam
all can eat the barley-cake
and sisters dear
may plait him bearded
for their hair
and all can sing:
Fol the dol the didiay
but he
he must be broken off at knee.
Within, in the lighted *sacellum*
as yet the *signum*
shorn soon
draggled at Black Fosse
lopped at the *agger*
stands dressed—reg'mental
and the binding *sacramentum*
is reaffirmed upon it.
Down the traversed history-paths
his stumbling *Grenadiere*
in the communication-ways
his burdened infants
shall learn like vows to take.

JOYCE certainly, and Dante probably, have had a hand in Mr. Jones' development, but his style is in no sense an imitation. Nor is this verse as "free" as at a superficial glance it looks. Mr. Jones is not a Welshman for nothing. Welsh poetry is famous for its use of internal rhyme and assonance, and a careful examination of the last quotation, for example, will disclose similar subtleties. Like Joyce, Mr. Jones uses a very wide vocabulary; like Joyce and Dante his poem is full of riddles which require considerable erudition to solve: unlike Joyce and Dante, however, he accompanies his text with his own commentary notes. In his introduction he says: "I ask the reader, *when actually engaged upon the text*, to consult these glosses mainly or only on points of pronunciation. For other purposes they should be read separately." Speaking for myself, I can only say that I have frequently found this advice impossible to follow. When the riddles depend on geological knowledge, I can solve them as I read, but when I come to such lines as the following about Abraham and Isaac

Take the lamb that you do love
—his mother's boy
get north-east by north
by way of Liknites' cave of bread,
past anemone-
dell where poor Ishtar is a-weeping
in the burning sun of day
where her precious
bloods the flowery carpet she shall kneel
at the turn of the hog-track.

to me they are nonsense poetry like Edward Lear's, until I consult the accompanying note:

. . . To get to it (Mount Moriah) from Beersheba one would, and the ancient track did, go via Bethlehem (House of Bread, or with equal significance *Beit Laham*, House of Flesh), a place sacred to Adonis for whom *Es Sitt*, 'the lady' (in this case Ishtar), weeps. The anemones in part of Palestine are still said to be red with his blood that was shed by the boar's tusks. The name Liknites was applied to Dionysius and other cult-figures and could signify 'crib-born.'

Once I have been informed, the lines not only cease to be nonsense, but become right and inevitable. My own advice to a reader, therefore, would be to read a section the first time very slowly, consulting *every* note, and then a second time without looking at one.

T. S. Eliot, Marianne Moore, William Empson (and Coleridge one might add) have supplied notes to their poems, but none of them to anything like the same degree as David Jones, and *The Anathemata* raises as never before the question whether a poem can be good which cannot be understood without them. One must begin by distinguishing between riddle which is, I believe, a fundamental element in poetry, and obscurity, which is an æsthetic vice. Every crossword-puzzle addict (it is curious that it should so often be precisely he who objects most violently to puzzles in poetry) knows the difference: when, having failed to get a word, he looks at the answer next week, he says either "What a fool I was. Of course that's it," or "The clue was unfair. Four or five other words would fit it equally well."

Yet the same man, when he comes to a line in a poem which he finds difficult, is apt to

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accuse the poet of making fun of him out of conceit, of sneering at his lack of knowledge or sensibility, when, in fact, the poet is only trying to give him fun. If a poet hesitates to add an explanatory note, his hesitation often arises from the same neighbourly feeling which restrains a man, looking over the shoulder of a fellow clubman as he does his weekly crossword, from telling him the answers. To be laughed at for not knowing something is not nearly so insulting as having one's ignorance falsely assumed and being informed of what one knows already.

While the riddle element has always existed in poetry, the disappearance of a homogeneous society with a common cult, a common myth, common terms of reference, has created difficulties in communication for the poet which are historically new and quite outside his control. The poet—and each one of his readers—is a particular man; none of them can become a generalised type. As Mr. Jones says in his introduction:

> The poet may feel something with regard to Penda the Mercian and nothing with regard to Darius the Mede. In itself that is a limitation, it might be regarded as a disproportion; no matter, there is no help—he must work within the limits of his love. There must be no mugging-up, no 'ought to know' or 'try to feel'; for only what is actually loved and known can be seen *sub specie aeternitatis*. The muse herself is adamant about this: she is indifferent to what the poet may wish he could feel, she cares only for what he in fact feels.

The question then arises whether a reader is entitled to retort: "It so happens that Darius means a lot to me and Penda nothing. I can only read about what I love and know."

If, as I believe, the reader is not entitled to this retort, it is because of a fundamental difference between the imaginative activity of making and that of reading. If the poet can only make a living work out of what he knows and loves, it is only a living work that the reader can, and with much less difficulty than one might suppose, translate and understand in terms of his own, different yet analogous, love and knowledge. The Darius-loving reader is able to see his hero in the poet's Penda because, and only because, the latter is a creation of love.

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This applies not only to the subject of a poem as a whole but also to every detail in it.

> The words 'May they rest in peace' and the words 'Whosoever will' might, by some feat of artistry, be so juxtaposed within a context as not only to translate the words 'Requiescat in pace' and 'Quicunque vult' but to evoke the *exact historic over-tones and under-tones* of those Latin words. But should some writer find himself unable by whatever ingenuity of formal arrangement or of contextual allusion to achieve this identity of content and identity of evocation, while changing the language, then he would have no alternative but to use the original form . . . , it is not a question of 'translation' or even of 'finding an equivalent word,' it is something much more complex. 'Tsar' will mean one thing and 'Caesar' another to the end of time.

To return to my American friends who have such difficulty in "getting" *The Anathemata*, their problem is not, I think, the introduction of strange historical proper names or the employment of foreign words, but the fact that what Mr. Jones calls "The Break," which occurred in Europe towards the end of the nineteenth century as a result of the technological

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revolution, occurred in America when the "Mayflower" landed on its shores. It would have made little difference if the first settlers had been Catholics instead of Protestants; they were faced with a continent with which the gods and goddesses of pre-Christian Europe had no relation, and too late in time for there to be any Christian absorption of whatever Indian myths there may have been. As an epigraph for his poem, Mr. Jones might have put "Behold, I make all things new"; i.e. his attitude is very different from that expressed by Milton in his Nativity Ode, in which one consequence of the Incarnation is that, somewhat to the poet's regret, the mythological gods, the household spirits, the local geniuses are once and for all abolished: for Mr. Jones the consequence is not their abolition but their redemption; when the Word is made Flesh a possibility of redemption is offered to all speech and to all bodies, to both the natural and the historical order (which is why the elements offered in the Mass are not corn and grape-juice but bread and wine, the product of human work). But on the North American continent there was neither a Nature nor a History to be redeemed from magic and idolatry; Nature in America was from the beginning what it had only lately become in Europe, naked, faceless, "unnuminous" Force, Henry Adam's Dynamo. The patron saint of the Italian island where I am writing this review is a lady whom I strongly suspect of having once had a tail and who is apt to send a sirocco whenever the Madonna has a feast; the Madonna of an American Catholic has never had such a rival.

Communication between persons with "unshared Backgrounds" is always possible if they have had analogous experiences—Welsh mythology, for example, is not one of my own "deposits," but thanks to other mythologies which are, I have little difficulty in acquiring it from the poet: but I can see that, for someone to whom *all* myths are stories mugged up at school from Bullfinch, very serious difficulties must arise. Since, however, everyone has, at least in his childhood, inhabited a magic mythological universe, I do not believe that difficulty means impossibility; the problem for an American or for most young townspeople today anywhere is how they are to recognise their own private and contemporary signs for such a world in Mr. Jones's historic signs.

The Anathemata is not an easy poem to describe. Imagine that, in the middle of the 20th century, in a world of atom-bombs, posters, and gossip-columnists, a man is attending Mass. This man is Adam, a European, a Welshman, a Londoner, a poet, himself. Some phrase or other from the rite catches his attention and his mind goes wool-gathering. And why not? Is not the rite he is attending itself a rite of anamnesis? The language sounding now in his physical ear is remote from the present age, formal, humourless, the creation of a vanished kind of society. The anathemata he thinks about,

> the blessed things that have taken on what is cursed and the profane things that somehow are redeemed: the delights and also the 'ornaments' . . . things dedicated after whatever fashion . . . things . . . that partake of the extra-utile and of the gratuitous; things that are the signs of something other . . . signs that . . . are themselves . . . what they signify.

all belong to the remote past—none of them is younger than the Roman Empire—but the language in which he thinks about them is the complex, ironical, historically conscious, informal language of our own time.

His wool-gatherings are divided into eight heaps, which, with childish crudeness, I should describe as follows:

(1) *Rite and Fore-Time.* Pre-history. The fashioning of the continents. The appearance of Nature's "adaptable, rational, elect and plucked out otherling." His earliest magical and artistic factures.

(2) *Middle-Sea and Lear-Sea.* The rise of coherent cultures, e.g. the Bronze Age culture of the Mediterranean and its diffusion by maritime trade.

(3) *Angle-Land.* The appearance of the Englishman as the result of a cross between Celtic and Teutonic stocks.

(4) *Redriff.* I am not sure what this is about. The Norse Invasions?

(5) *The Lady of the Pool.* The founding of London, of the English polis. The taking of "barbaric" Britain into the Roman civitas.

(6) *Keel, Ram, Stauros.* A very difficult

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section. I *think* it is about the conversion of Britain by Christian missionaries; the planting on her shores of the Cross.

(7) *Mabinog's Liturgy*. The coming of the God-Man in the fullness of time.

(8) *Sherthursdaye and Venus Day*. The redemption of time by His sacrifice.

Mr. Jones has set out to write a poem which should be at once epic, contemporary, and Christian. It would be interesting, on another occasion, to compare *The Anathemata* with another poem which is epic and contemporary, but religiously excludes any religious references whatsoever, St. Jean Perse's *Vents*. Something has already been said about the problems of a contemporary epic; the peculiar and paradoxical relation, for a poet who is a Christian, between his art and his faith raises all kinds of other fascinating questions. Is all "Christian" poetry, for example, necessarily and profoundly, a joke? Is it possible, in poetry, to speak of God the Father without making him indistinguishable from Zeus, or of God the Son without making him into another culture-hero like Dionysus or Hercules? If it is not possible, does it matter? But a review is not the place to discuss such matters. I can only conclude by reiterating my profound admiration for this work and expressing the hope that many others will come to share it.

W. H. Auden

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Lewis Carroll's private diaries have not been available previously to any member of the public. Their inaccessibility to the biographers of Dodgson and to research students has given rise to the suggestion that they contain information which his relations wished to keep from public knowledge, a rumour which will now be set at rest. In an introduction to the book, Lewis Carroll's nieces explain how the diaries come to be published now, why they were not published sooner, and how Roger Lancelyn Green, author of *The Story of Lewis Carroll*, came to be chosen by them for the work and given complete freedom to read and to publish all that the diaries have to tell about their author.

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THIS book* gives more than the title promises, and also less. More, since it is by no means simply a sociological study of the "pattern" of Communist action. It is, in itself, a succinct summary of the history of the Soviet State and of the whole Communist movement, compressing in relatively little space a very large amount of relevant material. Since Professor Seton-Watson collected his facts with great care, and from practically all available sources (a bibliography twelve pages long is appended to the text), his book can unhesitatingly be described as the best short guide to this most important subject, one which will be especially valuable for use either as a textbook or supplementary reading in universities.

The author, in his introduction, states modestly that his book is but a summary of research work done by others over the last twenty years, and the only originality he claims concerns the "pattern" mentioned in the title. Here he does himself an injustice, for I cannot help finding Professor Seton-Watson's sociological analysis less satisfactory and much less interesting than his acute and wonderfully crisp summary of the historical facts. What he says about the different reactions of undeveloped

* *The Pattern of Communist Revolution*. By HUGH SETON-WATSON. Methuen. 25s.

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and industrialised countries to Communism, about the fallacy of regarding Communism as a proletarian movement, about the role of the revolutionary intelligentsia in promoting Communism, especially in the "backward" part of the world—all this is not exactly new and could, it seems to me, be put with greater precision. Thus, if he stresses the predominance of the proletariat as against the intelligentsia in Western Communist movements, he does not seem to give due consideration to the paramountcy of intellectuals over workers in the Communist movements of the Anglo-Saxon countries (with the exception of Australia)—certainly not a negligible fact. In other words, Professor Seton-Watson seems to be much more skilful as a historian than as a sociologist.

Having said this, I hope I shall not appear presumptuous in criticising precisely the historical approach of Professor Seton-Watson, despite all the great merits of his presentation. *The Pattern of Communist Revolution* is essentially a text-book, with the conventional scholarly approach—which, after all, is the proper approach for such a work. I, on my side, believe that behind the historical facts and situations he describes there exists a whole "dimension" of Communist history which has hardly been touched upon by earlier research but which is now being explored by a growing group of experts (I need mention only Boris Nikolaevsky and Boris Meissner). Not that Professor Seton-Watson is unaware of this trend: he is constantly grappling with it, but not systematically, and with marked ambivalence.

For instance, Professor Seton-Watson states that "there are no grounds for believing that the Communists intended, once the [Spanish] war was won, to content themselves with conservative policies. . . . It can be assumed that they would have used their power to set up in Spain a Stalinist state. . . . That they did not succeed was due to the fact that the enemies of the republic were too strong." It is a passage apt to illustrate which "dimension" evades his approach.

The whole problem is wrongly put. It is not a question of what policy the Communists might have pursued after victory, but whether they sought victory at all. That they did not, is not a nasty slander by the "traitor" Krivitsky, not an inference by some hard-bitten ex-Communists, but is the view of so level-headed a Spanish politician as Indalecio Prieto. There is a good deal of evidence that the Communists did everything in their power to keep the war going (down to the moment when Stalin felt sure he could have his pact with Hitler) while systematically sabotaging all attempts to bring it to a successful conclusion. For Stalin believed that a Communist victory in Spain would encourage Chamberlain to make an anti-Soviet alliance with Hitler, and this would have put the Soviet Union in extreme jeopardy. It follows that Communist policy in Spain was throughout conditioned by a basic lie. Professor Seton-Watson is, one would think, the last person in the world to be deceived by Communist propaganda; yet, faced with the reality of Communism, he is just, sometimes, a little guileless. It is not easy, with a British background, to accept, as real modes of behaviour, things which, to a Communist, are so axiomatic as to be beyond all discussion.

The same British background of the author is probably responsible for another line of thought which seems incessantly to bedevil British policy towards Communism: the over-rating of "imperialist" and "foreign policy" aims in Communism as against the role of intra-party conflicts. This is a very natural error, since the English, like other peoples, tend to interpret foreign events in the light of their own historical background, which is certainly not devoid of "imperialism," but is happily free of mutual throat-cutting as a method of settling political differences. The result is that such sober interpreters as Professor Seton-Watson, opposed to nothing as much as "speculation," indulge in the wildest speculations when it is a matter of substituting imaginary "imperialist" or foreign policy motives for the real origins of important decisions.

For instance, Professor Seton-Watson states that when the Comintern initiated a Communist insurrection in Germany in August, 1923, this was due, less to the apparent revolutionary situation of the moment, than to the advent of the Stresemann cabinet which Moscow regarded as pro-Western. For a large number of reasons this interpretation is untenable. In the first place, the Soviet army,

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presumably not without the knowledge and approval of the Politburo, continued to provide the German army with important supplies while the Comintern was preparing its rising. Secondly, Stalin put himself down in writing as opposed to the uprising. Thirdly, Stresemann was hardly regarded as a great menace to Russia at that time, since nobody believed that his government would last for more than a few weeks. While overlooking these objections to his interpretation of Soviet policy, Professor Seton-Watson neglects the essential data of the real situation: Russia's internal problems and the conflicts within the Russian and German Communist parties. Lenin was dying, the struggle for the succession was on. At the same time, the country, having shed its revolutionary illusions and faced with an exceedingly unpromising reality, was longing for a way out. Trotsky and Zinoviev, however much they differed between themselves, saw this way out in a decisive revolutionary victory abroad, which, needless to say, would have undermined Stalin's still shaky control of the Russian party and state. These Russian antagonisms had their counterpart in an acute struggle inside the German party. No wonder that, as a consequence, Russian advice and instruction were hesitant, faltering, and self-contradictory, leading up to a *débâcle*. Of all this, hardly a word in Professor Seton-Watson's book.

Even more wayward is the author's interpretation of the blowing up of the Sofia cathedral in 1925 as a Russian reaction to Kemal Ataturk's rapprochement with the West. But what could Communist violence in Bulgaria have achieved if not a firmer accord between London and Ankara, with Budapest, Bucharest, and Belgrade being drawn into an active anti-Russian coalition? Surely neither Stalin nor foreign secretary Chicherin was ignorant of this. The situation was simpler. Zinoviev was almost at his last gasp in defending his position within the ruling triumvirate, and the Comintern was his only independent field of action. Being an hysteric and a very bad judge of situations and possibilities, Zinoviev desperately tried to gain a breathing-space by some sensational success. He first tried Esthonia and then Bulgaria, both times with disastrous results; and both times he used foreign Communists exactly as Stalin later used the Chinese Communists, when he ordered them to start a hopeless rising in Canton just to have drama to offer to the party congress which was to expel Trotsky. Englishmen, who cannot conceive of the subordination of major national interests to internal feuds, always—even where the evidence is overwhelming—tend to regard such motivations with scepticism. In the Soviet Union, however, they are real, and almost invariably they take precedence over national interests. Not to understand this means not to see what is perhaps the feeblest point of the Soviet system.

THIS comes out with particular clarity in Professor Seton-Watson's scepticism *vis-à-vis* my attempt to demonstrate that certain French Communists attempted to establish a dictatorship in order to forestall allied control of France in 1944, and that this was connected with the drive for more militant tactics of an extremist group, led by Andrei Zhdanov, within the international Communist movement. There were Communist risings at the time in France, but, says Professor Seton-Watson: "I cannot agree with Borkenau who

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For Winter, 1954

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takes these outbreaks very seriously, and regards them as an indication of major divergencies in the Soviet Politburo. Such divergencies may have existed, but the outbreaks do not prove it."

I was fairly certain of my interpretation when, in 1951, I wrote the incriminating passage. Since then, three new bits of evidence have reinforced my opinion. The first has issued from the French intra-party struggle: in the *considerata* to the expulsion of Marty and Tillon from the French Communist party, the Politburo stated officially, in barely concealed words, that these two, in 1944, advocated and attempted to start a rising against orders. Now, I am not one of those who regard official Communist documents as automatically veracious, but also I do not think they are nothing but a tissue of lies; invariably, they contain a mixture of truth and of lies. In the present case the official statement fits in perfectly with the role of Tillon as chief commander of the French Communist partisans, with the simultaneous expulsion of some of his closest collaborators, with the known role of Marty as head of the party's secret "*apparat*," as well as with the curiously half-hearted support given to the risings by the underground *Humanité* at the time. There cannot be any further doubt that one group in the French Politburo wished for a full-scale revolt, the other group for such harassing action against the retreating Germans as Eisenhower and de Gaulle had requested. The divergence was the cause of a bitter intra-party struggle and of acts of indiscipline. So much is proved. Would Professor Seton-Watson contend that a group in the French Politburo attempted to subvert the whole of Soviet foreign policy without having any secret backing in Moscow?

The second source now available to me is the German edition of a Yugoslav pamphlet about the Greek Civil War, by General Vukmanovic-Tempo, published in 1950, at a time when Tito and his men still took pride in being militant leftists. That pamphlet says nothing yet about intra-party struggles in the Kremlin (and for cause, since that would reveal much in which the Yugoslavs themselves were grimly involved—time, no doubt, will increasingly loosen their tongues). But it treats the whole Greek Civil War as connected with the intra-party struggle between moderates and extremists in Athens, relates the attitude of the moderates with Stalin's policy, that of the extremists with Tito's, and makes it clear that the struggle about tactics late in 1944, as again in 1946–49, was an international one. Without expressly mentioning Marty and Tillon, Vukmanovic confirms the close connection between guerilla problems in all countries and the drive of a Left extremist faction, largely led by Tito, towards an international rising.

The third piece of evidence comes, as is usual in these matters, from changes in Russian intra-party personnel, exhaustively collected and brilliantly interpreted by Professor Nikolaevsky in his regular contributions to the *Socialistichesky Vestnik* and the (New York) *New Leader*. It is he who called my attention to the significant fact that, at the very time when the Greek rising was repudiated in Moscow, Andrei Zhdanov was for months sent to Finland as reparations commissar—surely not a normal task for the second man of the Politburo—and that the recrudescence of civil war activities coincided with his reinstatement in the Kremlin. At this point, Vukmanovic's testimony is again pertinent by revealing that the continuation of the Greek rebellion by Ares Veluhiotis in April, 1945 (when Zhdanov was just recalled from Helsinki to Moscow), was supported by Tito and that Veluhiotis was killed by Tito's adversaries in Greece. I readily admit that those who deny the existence of any serious intra-party struggle in Moscow (but Professor Seton-Watson definitely does not belong to these) will still cry out about "speculation" and the absence of direct evidence. To me, it seems difficult to imagine that the incidents I have mentioned could have happened independently of one another.

I HAVE raised these particular problems at such length, in part because of their great intrinsic interest, but also to demonstrate how large is the gap between a grudging acceptance (as made by Professor Seton-Watson) of the importance in principle of the intra-party struggle in Communism, and the systematic application of that point of view, step by step. If I speak of these things incessantly, it is not a personal obsession or an "ex-Communist prejudice"; it is simply due to the knowledge, common to all those who were ever near the

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Communist "*apparat*," that the "real" history of Communism must largely be sought in the struggles for power within the Communist bureaucracy, and that grave misinterpretations are bound to arise every time the paramountcy of this aspect is forgotten.

Events in the field of international Communism have been chosen to demonstrate what I regard as the inadequacies of Professor Seton-Watson's approach simply because more evidence is readily available in this field than in that of Kremlin politics proper. Here, the time for a complete presentation has clearly not yet come; it is still a matter for the study of segments. The most hopeful thing about Soviet studies is that they are now rapidly approaching the real core of their subject, which was still completely hidden from almost all the interpreters, both hostile and friendly, of the 1930's and 1940's (not excluding the author of the present review). As the Soviet régime continues to decline, it will be less and less able to conceal its festering diseases, and it will become easier to integrate its secret history into the main body of our historical knowledge.

Franz Borkenau

ORTHODOXY AND THE VISION OF ART

FIFTEEN years ago Stephen Spender wrote *The Destructive Element*. The aim of that book was to show that "modern literature often reveals a consciousness of a destructive principle in modern society." This "destructive element" was portrayed as a "kind of social or political doom overtaking society." It was natural and easy in the 1930's to think exclusively in social and political terms and to underrate the moral and spiritual issues. *The Creative Element** corrects the balance. Mr. Spender now believes that a writer, instead of losing himself in the programmes of the marketplace, should follow his own creative vision. No doubt this creative vision will have social implications; no doubt, too, the form and content of his vision will necessarily be affected by contemporary ideas. What stands out, however, in the history of the writers of the last eighty years is "the release of individual vision without any allegiance to society." This, Mr. Spender thinks, is to be attributed to the feeling among writers that preoccupation with society saps vision—a feeling which is certainly right, but in its turn merely transitional, for Mr. Spender goes on to say that "the genius who frees us from the strangling embrace of society with individual vision, by defining and analysing this new situation, will perhaps be the great poet or novelist the mid-century is waiting for."

I am not quite sure of the meaning of this last sentence, but from what follows I understand by it that the great poet or novelist will come to terms with society, the while keeping his individual vision. Within the period surveyed by Mr. Spender, there has been at work the dialectic of opposites. At the beginning, the individual is in revolt against society and defiantly seeks a unique vision and technique. In the next stage he relinquishes his isolated standpoint to become preoccupied with political and social ideas; poetry becomes propaganda. The third stage should be one in which the creative vision of the artist is operative again, but his originality is found to be compatible with orthodoxy. What one might expect, therefore, is that the orthodox (and especially orthodox Christian) artist would be engaged in recreating society by the positive values of his faith. That they have not done so is amongst the chief complaints of *The Creative Element*.

With this hypothesis in mind, Mr. Spender examines a number of writers. They are all well known, so well known indeed, that little, it might be thought, remained to be said about them. But Mr. Spender is so close in heart and mind to most of his subjects that much

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can be gained from his study of them. Moreover, he is examining them with a special purpose in mind. He intends us to learn how they react to society and how far their genius benefits by being either too private or too taken up with social problems. One difficulty immediately presents itself. There are so many writers from whom to choose that the selection of nine or ten names must seem arbitrary or worse. (By "worse" I mean that they are selected to prove a prejudged case.) To this I can imagine Mr. Spender replying that he has, in fact, chosen representative figures and that in the last resort everyone must abide by his own judgement of excellence. This answer is satisfactory at first sight, but doubt recurs when we see individuals of very different moods and in very different contexts treated alike. England in the time of Matthew Arnold was markedly different from the France of Baudelaire or Rimbaud. Arnold detested the smugness and vulgarity of the new rich and lamented what he thought of as "the receding sea of faith." Baudelaire's attitude, on the other hand, cannot be explained as due to the failure of the Church "to interpret Christianity into terms which effectively criticise the values of modern civilisation." His concern is much more with sin than with any such "values of modern civilisation." The remark that "the modern tragedy lies in the failure of the sea of faith to flood external things" no doubt affects all, Baudelaire included, but his own statement, quoted in this book, that civilisation "consists in the diminution of the traces of original sin" is much more revealing. In France, faith is so deep-seated that its demands continue to haunt even those who have rejected it. Rimbaud is more like Satan than like Shelley. The one is a rebel, the other a revolutionary, and it is because of this that Claudel could so perceptively find in Rimbaud the goad to his own conversion. One could make capital of this instance and argue with Mr. Spender that what he demands in the orthodox is already happening, but in unexpected ways. He wants orthodox writers to forsake their concern with themselves and sin and eternity; but for all he knows they may, like Rimbaud, be pointing the way out of the wasteland by their nausea and nostalgia.

So odd and varied is the response of the artist to his environment that in every age cynicism and optimism, the hermitage and the rostrum can be found. This fact could be used against Mr. Spender's argument, but he does provide a strong case for his charge that the Church has not succeeded in providing "symbols which will enable us to feel and think morally about the activities of external life." The key-word in this sentence is "symbols," for it would be obviously untrue to say that the moralists of the Church have not written at length about these various activities. But while it is piping, the dancers are dancing to other tunes. The point, I think, is that writers do not think or use their imagination in terms of the Christian faith. In the Marxist language, man is "alienated" from the Christian world of values. Now few would deny that the modern artist no longer lives in the happy condition of, let us say, the Middle Ages, when belief was a second nature and gave content and inspiration to every kind of activity. Other values have come to the forefront, and Matthew Arnold is rightly chosen by Mr. Spender as a poet deeply affected by the change. The feeling of a rift was to grow, and

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writers turned more and more into themselves to seek within what they could not find without. Many a writer down the centuries has done the same, but usually he adapted accepted forms and symbols to his vision. What is exceptional among the writers of the last century is their flight from current forms and their attempt to create a world which has no allegiance to the past. Yeats turns to magic and myth, D. H. Lawrence to an earthy goddess, and others borrow from the psychology of Jung. The less great poets become thereby incomprehensible to the public, and are less and less read.

Mr. Spender's own original vision has not meant for him isolation from society. Conscience has given him a sense of responsibility, and his fellow-feeling with many of the best of his contemporaries makes what he has to say of them significant and fresh. One is made to wonder even, at times, whether his sympathy has not led him to exaggerate their importance. Is not Rilke, for instance, the kind of introspective poet who is found in any age? Forster, again, seems to me to be a recurring type, that of the fastidious mind which, so long as its own liberties and tastes are safeguarded, lets the world go its own course. He is an odd juxtaposition to Orwell, who was intolerant even of Eliot's "mysticism" and the "hocus-pocus" of Yeats. As one reads these pages other names flit in and out: Aldous Huxley, Norman Douglas, Henry James. Mr. Spender mentions James and would have it that his "vision goes deeper into social causes . . . than those critics thought who imagined him to be an æsthete and a social snob." No doubt "James was concerned with social disease"; but surely only to the extent that every perceptive and human person must be. And if a liaison be sought between the æsthete and the passionate lover of human equality and social justice, such as Orwell, Aldous Huxley would fit the brief better. But, among all the competitors, Mr. Spender's preference is for D. H. Lawrence. He regards him as the greatest critic of contemporary society, "because he is the only one whose grasp of the values of living is never intellectualised or idealistic. It's always real." Whatever we may think of this verdict, it does show clearly what Mr. Spender's standards are and where, in his view, perfection lies. It helps us also to understand why, up to now, he is dissatisfied with the answers given by those whom he calls the orthodox: T. S. Eliot, W. H. Auden, and Evelyn Waugh.

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EVELYN WAUGH looks strange in this company. With most of the writers discussed in *The Creative Element* Mr. Spender has something in common, as in fact most of the writers have something in common with each other. Evelyn Waugh is indeed orthodox by conviction, but for the rest he has no faith in what Mr. Spender would like to see come about, nor does he share Mr. Spender's interests. Perhaps it is for this very reason that a chapter is devoted to him, in order that an enemy should have a fair hearing. What happens could be predicted. In trying to be fair and to restrain his dislike, Mr. Spender loses that poetic sensitiveness which is his greatest gift, and he ends in doing justice neither to Waugh nor to himself. He says of Waugh that "when he is solemn, his work provides an extravagant example of faith without charity." Waugh could, I think, retort, and with more

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justice, that when Mr. Spender becomes solemn he provides an example of an attempt to be charitable without faith or understanding. How much better it would have been if some other orthodox writer had been chosen whose outlook came nearer to that of the ideals expressed in this book.

The question: "Or is the return to orthodoxy just a turning away of literature from life into the shadows and acceptance of death?" can be answered in the negative. The question does an injustice to such writers as Eliot and Auden, as well as to the host of writers who make it their chief concern to rejuvenate society. But the very way in which the question is framed suggests that there is a lingering confusion in Mr. Spender's mind about the problem which he has so much at heart. That problem will never be understood so long as it is posed in terms of death and life. There may be writers who long to live in the shadows and embrace the thought of death, but they are not of the company of the "orthodox." To the latter, the problem is not one of conflicting desires for death or life; it is how best they and society can live, and if they appear to disdain the contemporary scene it is because by such means they believe those who are content with it can be brought to their senses.

We may well hope that literature will gather strength from an alliance with a society confident in some rich belief. Such a belief would provide material and inspiration and bring the artist back into the centre. But when this hope has been expressed, the problem remains how to bring this end about, and here the factors are so multitudinous and obscure that little can be said with certainty. One writer will agree with the new school of religious thinkers who hold that in every movement of ideas there is a moment, a *kairos*, when those ideas can be uplifted into a glowing truth. Others will put on one side social movements and risk all on the success of personal relations. Not things but persons, he will cry; not "it" but "I and Thou." The religious poet tends to rely on the Gospel saying: "seek ye first the kingdom of God, and all things will be added unto you," and with this in mind he will maintain that, in emphasising the interior life and the pressure of the eternal on time, he is serving society better than those who are bent on immediate improvements and immediate results. Another, with a feeling for history, may judge that the present society cannot be transformed, because its trend cannot be stopped, and that this trend is predominantly evil. Still another, with a long view, may hold that our present society contains within itself grounds for hope, but time is necessary for historical change; change may be imperceptible, and the signs are that the time is not yet ripe.

These and countless other instances could be given to show that the question Mr. Spender asks does not admit of any easy answer, if indeed it can be answered at all. That, however, it should be asked is timely, and the act of a wise man. In reading *The Creative Element* one is forced to join in the debate, and at the end it has become easier to understand the difficulties of the modern writer and to sympathise with his plight and with his hopes.

M. C. D'Arcy, S.J.

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